

“NOT EVERYONE WAS ASLEEP”:  
ANTI-COLONIAL PERSONIFICATIONS OF ANTIQUITY AND PROGRESS  
IN JOSÉ RIZAL’S *TOUCH ME NOT* AND *EL FILIBUSTERISMO*

by

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English, Literature  
Boise State University

December 2013

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BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE COLLEGE

**DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS**

of the thesis submitted by

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Thesis Title: “Not Everyone Was Asleep”: Anti-Colonial Personifications of Antiquity and Progress in José Rizal’s *Touch Me Not* and *El Filibusterismo*

Date of Final Oral Examination: 18 October 2013

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## DEDICATION

For Natividad Farinas Tolentino, also known as “Lanai Grandma”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my deepest gratitude to the members of my thesis committee: Jacky, Gautam, and Shelton, for their invaluable expertise, continued support, and seemingly infinite patience throughout this challenging and rewarding experience.

Thank you to my wonderful parents, family, and friends, wherever you are: in Hawaii, Washington, Idaho, and the Basque Country. You keep me humble and inspired. I couldn't have made it *this far* and accomplished *this much* without your constant love and encouragement.

## ABSTRACT

“Not Everyone Was Asleep”:

Anti-Colonial Personifications of Antiquity and Progress in José Rizal’s

*Touch Me Not* and *El Filibusterismo*

Lyn K. Uratani

The cultural emphasis placed on José Rizal’s execution in 1896 has overshadowed his life and renders his novels *Touch Me Not* and *El Filibusterismo* unfamiliar to Western readership and postcolonial scholars. Since his novels emphasize the difficult questions about the absence of progress and ethnic identity for the indigenous populace, I argue that to read them for plot alone is to overlook his main focus: the formation of the Filipino identity.

In light of Spain’s historical treatment of its colonies, my work responds to the lack of attention given to *Touch Me Not* and *El Filibusterismo* as integral texts of 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist discourse by underscoring the innovativeness of Rizal’s political goals for the Philippines. I utilize interdisciplinary inquiry of postcolonial and nationalist commentary to elucidate his anti-colonial stances through character and textual analyses. To assist my arguments, I consult the foundational postcolonial texts of Homi K. Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Edward W. Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and the nationalist discourses of Benedict Anderson and Partha Chatterjee.

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INTRODUCTION: WHY I WRITE ON RIZAL; OR, WAKING DORMANT  
HISTORICAL MEMORY

José Rizal is best remembered within domestic and international Filipino communities for advocating education and government reforms during the final decade of Spanish occupation in the Philippines during the 1890s. Further reinforcing his legacy are his numerous publications in anti-colonial periodicals, scholarly works on Philippine history and folklore, and his novels *Touch Me Not* and *El Filibusterismo*. Together, these texts garnered international support for his agendas of Philippine political autonomy and a closer economic partnership between the islands and Spain (Thomas 2). Yet in spite of the extent and variety of his political publications and achievements, Rizal is celebrated more his role as a political martyr in 1896; his death by firing squad is commemorated as a Philippine national holiday. It is unsurprising, consequently, that the cultural emphasis placed on his execution has overshadowed his life and renders his novels unfamiliar to Western readership and postcolonial scholars.

*Touch Me Not* is the first of his two novels, which Rizal published in Germany in 1887 to avoid charges of treason by the Spanish government (Augenbraum). The novel's publication achieved European support for the Philippine nationalist cause, provided motivation for the Philippine Revolution in 1896, and ultimately led to his exile and execution within the same year. Furthermore, Harold Augenbraum declares the text "the first major artistic manifestation of Asian resistance to colonialism" (xviii), a celebratory statement that draws attention to the troubling scarcity of scholarship on Rizal's literary



contributions and the necessity of uncovering such previously unexamined postcolonial texts for wider readership and research. But the inability of *Touch Me Not* to sustain lasting effects on either nationalist discourse or literary scholarship also signals the evident loss of historical memory regarding the Philippines' efforts toward independence. Whether or not we recognize this in terms of a domestic or international forgetfulness resulting from the United States' lengthy presence in the former archipelago colony following the 1898 Spanish-American War, the absence of knowledge about Rizal's literary contributions to anti-colonial discussion showcases this troubling amnesia toward his novels.

Thus, despite their shared histories as Spanish colonies, direct comparisons should not be made between independence movements in Latin American nations and Philippine nationalist sentiment, given that the colonies in the Americas sought and attained separation from Spain almost eighty years prior to the Spanish-American War. Whereas the regional proximity of the American Revolution and Spain's involvement in the Napoleonic Wars inspired Latin America to obtain independence, the Philippines and remaining island colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Guam remained in Spanish possession until the end of the war in 1898 (Walker). Rather, the eighty years separating Spain's losses in the Americas from its relinquishing of Caribbean and Pacific Rim territory is more appropriately considered as results of very separate European conflicts that only share the effect of accelerating the colonized subject's fascinations with independence. Rizal's use of *Touch Me Not* for political activism is most significant to the last twenty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and best measured with nationalist uprisings during this specific timeframe, rather than part of the full spectrum of anti-colonial

writers spanning the history of the Spanish Empire. However, even these temporal and ideological differences communicate the necessity of eventually examining Rizal's goals of nationhood as they compare to or deviate from previous and contemporary colonial movements in protest of Spain.

Beginning with the dedication page of *Touch Me Not*, Rizal addresses not a Spanish-ruled colony, but what he has instead chosen to identify as "his country," stating: "How often, in the midst of modern civilizations have I wanted to bring you into the discussion, [...] reproduce your current condition without prejudice, and lift the veil hiding your ills" (3). By explaining his impulse to illustrate the Philippines' subordinate position as a colonial subject around the hope that his homeland will eventually reclaim an identity, he demands that his readership view itself apart from this imperial framework.

In other words, it is Rizal's willingness to unsettle issues of the colonial image and national identity that leaves his novels rife with opportunities for postcolonial analyses. The sixty-three chapters of *Touch Me Not*, followed by thirty-nine more in *El Filibusterismo*, provide seemingly endless routes into a postcolonial study of the Philippines under Spanish colonial rule, via the fictitious microcosm of the town San Diego. Yet, even in commencing *Touch Me Not* with Rizal's brief address to his "country," I argue that to read his novels for plot alone is to overlook the main focus of his text: the formation of the Filipino identity. To attribute his own "defects and shortcomings" to the colony's "current condition" is to prioritize overcoming a reluctance to normalize and embrace the indigenous position and political voice.

As such, the first two chapters of this thesis examine how Rizal attends to and purposefully alters the images and identities of the decolonized subject and colonizer to demarcate evidence of progress and stagnation within Philippine society. The first chapter analyzes the oppression of indigenous supporters of education via the plights of Tasio, Ibarra, and Elías, and the second examines how the indigenous Doñas Victorina and Consolación are othered for failing to embody the Spanish ideal of whiteness. In spite of socioeconomic standing, education level, or even ideological agreement with Spanish oversight, these indigenous subjects are consistently punished for behaviors—however productive—that intrude upon the colonizer’s identity and privileges.

The third chapter examines the abrupt ending of *Touch Me Not* insofar as it allows Rizal to clarify his political stances toward colonial reform in Rizal’s second novel, *El Filibusterismo*. To connect the two texts, I construct a bridge the college-age Ibarra with Basilio’s educational growth in the second novel to examine the ideological manipulation of Filipino youth and how their loss of naïveté assists what Frantz Fanon calls, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the “violent” process of decolonization (31). Underscoring Basilio’s ideological awakening in the second novel are analyses of his peers, Plácido and Isagani, who make the decision to harness their political voice by challenging their Spanish professors. Through their mutual camaraderie as students and expressed frustrations with the colonial education system, they create the basis for what Benedict Anderson explains, in his book *Imagined Communities*, as “a deep, horizontal comradeship” required for the formation of national identity (7).

Where *Touch Me Not* lacked in ideological decisiveness, *El Filibusterismo*, published four years later in 1891, very harshly delineates Rizal’s anticolonial

positioning. Harold Augenbraum emphasizes the importance of reading the text “as the second half, not a sequel” to *Touch Me Not*, thus viewing both works as “one novel published in two parts, a single story” (xvi). As Augenbraum notes (xvi) and is apparent on the first page of *El Filibusterismo*’s original transcript in Spanish, Rizal describes the latter publication as a “continuación de [*Touch Me Not*].” While Augenbraum’s brief comparative approach to the original text certainly helps to elucidate the incomplete nature of the native response to the Spaniard’s abuses in Rizal’s first novel, his separation of the terms “continuation” and “sequel” is less clear in Spanish, given that both English words can be translated to *continuación*. Nonetheless, in regarding *El Filibusterismo* as a text that extends and thus completes *Touch Me Not*, readers are given greater confirmation of the writer’s political commentary.

Despite Rizal’s apparent indecision toward various routes of colonial reform in *Touch Me Not*, *El Filibusterismo* demonstrates his attempts to fill the ideological gaps made apparent in the earlier text. Placed alongside *Touch Me Not*, Rizal’s second novel “makes the radical suggestion that the cultural history of nationalism, shaped through its struggle with colonialism, contained many possibilities of authentic...social identities that were violently disrupted” (Chatterjee 156). There, the narrative of *El Filibusterismo* evolves into one that finally confronts the well-illustrated problem of indigenous suppression seen in the previous text, and offers a much bolder solution to colonial abuses: the violent recovery of the Philippines to its own people. As demonstrated in the lost potential of Tasio, Ibarra, Elías, and other progress-demanding characters in colonial society, Rizal’s use of identity to frame his anti-colonial commentary in *Touch Me Not* connects to Chatterjee’s notion of identity “disruption.” But via his second novel, this

identity-centered critique of Spanish influence on the indio is given new purpose through Plácido, Isagani, and Basilio, characters that willingly depart from the silenced position of the subaltern in order to respond directly to the colonizer.

To achieve this, Rizal adds thirteen years between both novels' plotlines and replaces extended descriptions via narrative with increased dialogue, further separating the two texts from one another in tone, context, and thus in political approach. While his first text leaves his Philippine readership to wonder or attempt to conclude where their societal "shortcomings" lie, *El Filibusterismo* foregoes these subtleties in terms of "bringing [the island colony] into discussion" (3); Rizal's bluntness in narrative and minimized character description together renders the second novel 100 pages shorter than *Touch Me Not*. The writer instead forces his characters to interact, uncomfortably and pointedly magnifying the Philippines' increasing class divides, political corruption, and discontent. He relents only to indirectly provide textual closure to educational progress resulting from reforms of the 1868 Revolution, decrees that allowed colonized subjects of the Spanish Empire to receive schooling through the "primary level" (Ross 25). As an answer to the question of whom finally "speaks" in *El Filibusterismo*, Rizal interestingly privileges the dialogue of indigenous college students from the Catholic-run University of Santo Tomás. Theirs, as readers immediately recognize, is a unique demographic both articulate in Spanish and trained to "ask questions [that were] abstract, profound, captious, enigmatic" since "to call attention to [oneself] and be known is to pass the school year" (100). Such an unapologetic "continuation" of *Touch Me Not* reveals how Basilio's generation keenly utilizes both language fluency and knowledge of the colonizer's education system to test and defy social and political boundaries.

Thus, I am compelled to explore *Touch Me Not* and, to a lesser extent within this thesis, *El Filibusterismo*, for the opportunity to present my findings on novels that reflect the disintegration of Spanish colonial control during the fin-de-siècle. At the root of my interests is my desire to illuminate novels deeply connected to my cultural heritage, and in defiance of the Western canon's limitations, bring attention to two largely unknown literary texts and their author. To address the purposes of the first and most selfish intent, I attend to Edward W. Said's apt statement: "Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient" (20). My experiences with the Filipino culture are remarkably comparable to Rizal's insights into the societal tensions of the island colony during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, despite the passing of six generations since the novel's publication in 1887. More specifically, I regard these cultural interactions in light of my position as an ideological product of the West due to my American upbringing, as well as the complex identities that arise from the recognition of my own connections to both Spanish colonizer and Philippine colonized.

The problem of reconciling the apparent lack of differences between my perceptions of the Filipino culture with Rizal's instead demonstrates my limitations as a witness to the ideological symptoms of the nation's once-colonial status. While having personal ties to the writer's geographical focus adds context and meaning to my research, my experiences are temporally and ideologically limited: I will never understand Spain's influence and governmental oversight as Rizal and my maternal ancestors did. Although I am able to identify, as Said denotes, "the disparity between my experience and the Western depiction," I also realize that I am restricted, as what I think I know of "cultural discourse and exchange within a culture...is not 'truth' but representations" (21). Given

that my undergraduate background in literature consisted only of writers and works from Western Europe and the United States, providing postcolonial analyses of Rizal's texts remains uncharted territory in my educational upbringing. By ideologically situating myself apart from these assumed "truths" about the Filipino culture, I am able to instead privilege Rizal's location as a colonial spectator—although not fully unbiased to it vis-à-vis his family's economic status—to the end of the Spanish Empire, and his novels as his exposé.

In light of Spain's historical treatment of its colonies, my work responds to the lack of attention given to *Touch Me Not* and *El Filibusterismo* as integral texts of 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist discourse by underscoring the innovativeness of Rizal's political goals for the Philippines. Since his novels place a clear emphasis on the difficult questions about the absence of progress and ethnic identity for the indigenous populace, I have privileged interdisciplinary inquiry to further elucidate his anti-colonial stances. Thus, I have chosen not to solely prioritize the insights of foundational postcolonial texts such as Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, and Said's *Orientalism*, but to also consult recent scholarship on nationalism and historical commentary on the Philippines. In doing so, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* has assisted my aims to define Rizal's anti-colonial illustrations in terms of national identity formation, with the latter text providing sizeable discussion of the Philippines during Spanish and American occupation. Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments* also offers important commentary, not only in response to Anderson's arguments, but with regard to Chatterjee's own location as a part

of what he describes as the “once-colonized” (13). His is a position that—by extension of my interactions with and within the Filipino culture—I nonetheless share.

The next three chapters are an interrogation of but a fraction of the many questions that his novels raise for me as I pursue such questions of ethnic and national identity. Those familiar with the Philippines will want to know why I have left out excluded analysis of Catholicism in the former Spanish colony, and what is manifested in *Touch Me Not* and *El Filibusterismo* as Rizal’s harsh critique of the religion and its leadership. In light of its stifling and resentment-fostering effects on his progress-seeking indigenous population, I actually intended to write extensively on his portrayal of the topic, since aside from their base political corruption, the friars of *Touch Me Not* are repeatedly depicted as physically violent and even perverse. Including numerous other abuses that climax with their destruction of Ibarra’s school, they order Sisa’s nervous breakdown-inducing arrest after Father Salví kills her son—Basilio’s brother—for supposedly stealing money (128-32), and furthermore, the same priest repeatedly stalks Ibarra’s love interest, Maria Clara (151-2). Discussion of this group of Church leadership in the text once seemed an easy route into elaboration on the indio’s position as Bhabha’s “Other” or Spivak’s “subaltern” to overturn what Enrique Dussel and Michael Barber call “the myth that conquest is for the benefit of the dominated one” (54).<sup>1</sup> As I have become accustomed to the idea that studying critical theory is a long-term process, however, the

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<sup>1</sup> Although in context of Latin American history, Dussel and Barber’s phrasings of conquest and its impact on the colonized subject in *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity* are useful as I define my textual approach.



complexities surrounding the friars' unusually influential position in the Philippines often led me astray from examining Rizal's novels themselves.

So instead I prioritize how Rizal demonstrates the resolve of the Filipino native to overcome Dussel and Barber's notion of "declaring the Other the cause of [his or her] victimization" (64), or in simpler terms, how Rizal gives emphasis to the indio's attempts toward agency despite his or her subjugation. I have thus decided to first avoid detailed discussion of Catholicism in the former colony, to more carefully examine how the indios actively and disastrously attempt to seek entrance into the Spaniards' domain, an important aspect of Rizal's commentary that diminishes via a simplistic focus on the Church's documented manipulation of the people. Only by examining and immersing myself in the standpoint of "the skin of the humiliated, marginalized person packed among wretched millions" (74) am I able to view and uphold the colonial situation in the manner that Rizal hopes to "reproduce."

To someday examine the large-scale presence of Catholicism in his novels, the discussion must commence at the level of dialogue and exchange between the indio and his or her Spanish oppressor, an argument I hope to initiate in the following chapters. Isolating this reprimand-driven dynamic allows me to establish the importance of the native's assertions and responses to the colonizer, an effort that has further revealed the development and solidification of Rizal's political stances and certainly destabilized any simplistic postcolonial understanding of his novels. Clarifying my mention of "simplistic," what can be viewed as the familiar process of demonizing the Spaniard and pitying the Filipino is made less effective when the writer himself criticizes the second's

attempts to dissociate from his or her indigenous identity or forcibly meet the colonizer's social position, one inadequate to European standards of modernity.

While Fanon's writings on race have been especially useful in order to arrive at these claims, I also believe that Rizal's travels throughout Europe and relationships established in Austria-Hungary and Germany heavily influenced his criticism of the desirability of Spanishness, given his choice to publish *Touch Me Not* in the latter country (xxi). The writer's exposure to additional locales and peoples that constitute the West, by comparison, renders the sole representative of this ideological region in the Philippines an ironic Other to its own continent. In his article, "The Bullfight and Spanish National Decadence," César Graña gives further context to Spain's inability to fit in as a "modern" European nation:

The [modern world] sets the terms for success or failure in remarkably explicit ways...life's expectations and rewards are defined as being susceptible of being measured, accumulated, organized and planned... This was the world that Spain protruded as a painful and scandalous exception. In the "conquering" nation par excellence, the press, literature and public opinion were filled with voices lamenting Spain's incapacity to join the reigning historical impetus by contributing to its agenda or matching its expertise. (33)

From Graña's perspective, we must not value Spain's conduct within the framework of nineteenth century European modernity as participatory in this discourse. When we read his article alongside Rizal's texts, this excerpt reminds us of the indigenous subject's continued unawareness that his or her attempts to find productivity and meaning actually do demonstrate—although they are not treated with the same value as—efforts toward modernity. Provided with only the Spanish example of the Western ideal to follow, each additional layer of "rice powder" instead causes Victorina and Consolación to appear to degenerate before the reader, just as Ibarra's ego is severely checked through his

continued attempts at political involvement. Graña further explains: “Modernity constitutes urgently structured work... Spain was the archetypical land of ritual luxury, of a majestic and ironic fatalism, of a brilliant and seductive artisanship of leisure” (33). Thus “ritualizing” the process of becoming Spanish does little for these characters, which instead of “modernizing” the indigenous for their supposed benefit, confines them to the familiar location of othered suppression or failure. Rizal makes the effort to encourage the development of a national consciousness, and does so through these small-scale encounters between the European and indio, a handful of interactions that I examine in the following chapters.

Maintaining this focus on the punishment-laden relationship between colonizer and colonized has unfortunately led me to leave out further discussion of an element that I have thoroughly enjoyed about Rizal’s writing style: his dark humor. As a primary facet of his narrative in *Touch Me Not*, it establishes an offbeat sense of fairness in ridiculing both the Spaniard and the Filipino, especially with regard to Church practices. Victorina and Consolación are only two of many subjects that undergo the wit and wrath of the narrator, with the first given added use for comic relief in both novels. The epilogue of *Touch Me Not* gives Victorina an excellent send-off, in which readers are told:

Since many of our characters are still alive and we have lost sight of the others, a true epilogue is impossible. For everyone’s benefit, we would gladly kill off all [of them], beginning with Father Salví and finishing up with Doña Victorina. [...] Doña Victorina has added to her fake curls and her Andalusianism (if they will allow us that word) the new habit of wanting to drive her own coach horses... Many days the servants see [her husband] without his teeth, which, as our readers well know, is a bad sign. (419)

The work I have done with postcolonial theory steers me away from simply relishing in Rizal’s sharp sense of humor in *Touch Me Not*. While I could discuss the emasculation—

and arguably, rape-like violation—of Don Tiburcio via the forceful removal of his dentures, I do not want to overlook the writer’s plain intent to evoke his readers’ laughter and enjoyment. Certainly, Rizal keeps his promise of revealing the Philippines’ “defects and shortcomings,” which he accomplishes in both by hilariously pointing out the absence of Victorina’s authenticity in identity, empowered only through being able to render her own husband silent. The fact that she remains unknowing of her failure to assume the likeness of the Spaniard is one of many lighthearted details that just as importantly indicate the writer’s anti-colonial critique. In the same way that Rizal leads us to sympathize with the mistreated Filipino, he also acknowledges our loss of patience with her antics and distaste for Father Salvi’s predatory behavior. Thus, while the writer knows that his readers would gladly welcome their decisive extermination from the text, he also recognizes how these characters can be used for continued anti-colonial discussion of the “invitation to identity” in *El Filibusterismo*.

Rizal situates each of his non-Spanish characters to make or reject this decision to become Spanish, and reveals the dual consequences of accepting or denying the colonizer’s “invitation to identity.” Ultimately, the importance of turning against the colonizer via progressive thought—while reiterating an inescapability of the colonizer’s ideological influences—becomes his catch-22 for *Touch Me Not*. He balances the rational and educated characters of Tasio and Ibarra with the vanity of the falsely Spanish Victorina and Consolación, by inflicting subaltern status onto the first and illustrating the latter as undesirable and overwhelmingly grotesque. Rizal reminds his readership of Spain’s identity-based influence over and disdain for indigenous subjects who reject

these colonially defined norms, using *Touch Me Not* to suggest varied solutions for reform and *El Filibusterismo* to assert identity through defiance.

Said describes the body of his research for *Orientalism* as “an attempt to inventory the traces upon...the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been as powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals” (25). How I have desired to learn of my location within Chatterjee’s label of the “once-colonized,” a process hindered by the burning of churches, the subsequent loss of paper records, and most unfortunately thus, the loss of memory. And since I cannot go to the northern Philippines to study my relatives’ graves, let alone resurrect these ancestors to interrogate them, I can only conduct an “inventory” on myself to check my romantic perceptions of the Spaniard and the Filipino.

CHAPTER ONE: “REGRESSION TO ANTIQUITY”: A REVIVAL OF TASIO,  
IBARRA AND ELIAS TO ISOLATE RIZAL’S POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON  
EDUCATION

For the temporal and ideological purposes of tracking Spain’s imperial decline as a world power from the perspective of the Philippine colonial subject, José Rizal, continually labeled both model citizen and political martyr, is the most celebrated key indigenous witness and victim of the Empire’s final thirty years of colonial control. After all, his enviable educational achievements and untimely death are his most retold biographical details, with his execution date still celebrated as a holiday by Filipinos and their diaspora abroad.

Within the past fifteen years, my home state erected two statues of Rizal on the island of Oahu, with one at the Filipino Cultural Center in the former sugarcane producing town of Waipahu and the other located in the Historic Chinatown district of downtown Honolulu. To affirm the observation that Rizal’s increasingly abbreviated biography continues to overshadow his literary contributions, a June 2011 article in the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* announcing the second Rizal statue in the Chinatown district succinctly describes him as a “Filipino patriot who inspired revolution through nonviolence” whose actions “will inspire modern-day Filipinos to take a more prominent role in Hawaii society” (Nakaso 1). An October 2012 article by the *Carson Bulletin* discussing the California city’s unveiling of its own Rizal sculpture states nearly the

same; the presence of the monument should serve as a “permanent reminder” of his “peaceful” pursuit of “reforms for freedom” (Frost 1).

As endearing as these remarks are, such otherwise vague commentary about the Philippine doctor and political activist is unnecessarily perpetuated. With more textual space reiterating his idealistic and yet truncated biography, there is unfortunately less written to productively contextualize his role among his reform-seeking peers, especially with regard to the important nationalist discussions that their efforts incited. Consequently, we must also acknowledge that both Rizal’s privileged background and the colonial education reforms enacted during his lifetime provided the crucial foundation for his political voice by empowering the larger colonized whole, regardless of socioeconomic class.

Born in 1861 to upper class and racially mixed parents in the Philippines, Rizal’s socioeconomic standing directly linked him to the polarizing images of the prosperous Spaniard and the impoverished indigenous Filipino. Despite being guaranteed an education via his family’s accrued wealth, Spain’s 1868 Revolution brought to its colonies reforms for “universal schooling minimally through the primary level,” changes that undoubtedly affected his generation’s access to economic mobility (Ross 25). Although established as the nation’s liberal response to the criticisms and demands of its global political opponents, these reforms only hastened the Empire’s deterioration, by nurturing from within Rizal’s generation domestic opposition to the colonizer via a group known as the *ilustrados*. Succinctly defined by Paul A. Kramer as “enlightened, educated Philippine youth” (36), the *ilustrados*’ fluency in the Spanish language allowed Rizal and his Filipino peers to take full advantage of their linguistic abilities as a means of

increasing international attention for Philippine independence. In this sense, I argue that the *ilustrados* were politically mobilized through the very reforms that minimally ensured their literacy, since such legislation would have initiated the blurring of class boundaries among the indigenous community. Even though Rizal was from an upper class family, his less-affluent peers' exposure to education would have gradually shifted Philippine colonial society toward increased literacy and the people's awareness of its political voice. It is no wonder, therefore, that while studying in Madrid, Rizal and other *ilustrados* formed and distributed *La Solidaridad*, the first of many anti-colonial publications calling for Spain to minimally provide the Philippines with greater political freedoms and educational opportunities.

Such historical developments and complexities of class and legislation are not directly addressed within *Touch Me Not*, leaving readers, unfamiliar with Spanish colonial history in the Philippines, little assistance in understanding the subtleties of Rizal's narrative and literary illustrations. Thus my analysis is intrinsically tied to the problematic decision to "secularize" Philippine parishes to include indio and mestizo priests, a class issue moreover worsened by the liberal reforms in education enacted following the 1868 Revolution (Abinales and Amoroso 104). The notion that education can be used to deepen fractures in colonial oversight and otherwise upset the former system of domination by Spanish religious authority—through the nurturing of "local" talent and solidification of indigenous influence within governmental hierarchies—is useful in attending to the ways in which Rizal addresses the ideological and class disparities between "an impoverished and discontented peasantry and a wealthy but disgruntled elite" (102). As I seek to understand why I am able to relate to Rizal despite



centuries of detachment from the colonial experience, it is essential to include Ania Loomba's extended view of ideology as the "beliefs, concepts, and ways of expressing [his] relationship to the world" (67) as having intrinsically formed Rizal's articulation of the power structures affecting progress in Philippine society.

I emphasize my approach to the anti-colonial use of education as it is represented in the text, in terms of the value or control Rizal prescribes to it, via three vehicles of literary illustration: the characters of Tasio the Philosopher, Juan Crisóstomo Ibarra, and Elías. As they work to undo the suppression of Western manifestations of education and progress in the town of San Diego, these characters are submitted to the characteristic treatment of Bhabha's "Other" and Spivak's "subaltern" in being punished for their anti-colonial efforts. Furthermore, they are linearly linked: Tasio's lack of political voice inspires Ibarra's monetary generosity and governmental involvement, and the promise of Ibarra's influence on San Diego inspires the revolutionary Elías to assist the former's rise by taking violent action against the Spanish colonial authorities. But beyond the elderly Tasio, the latter characters possess greater agency to bring their proposals of societal change to fruition via their youth and visible presence within the town. Nevertheless, each character promotes economically and philosophically disparate perspectives in support of the necessity of progress. These varied societal locations reveal multifaceted and distorted relationships between the colonially designed middle class and its government.

Having chosen isolation on the outskirts of San Diego and been labeled a "madman" by the Catholic friar Dámaso (78), Tasio's subjugated treatment personifies the consequences of refusing a colonial-controlled education in exchange for self-

edification and a reliance on reason. Working against Said's notion of "[the West's] intellectual authority over the Orient" (19) to instead "present intellectual genealogy in a way that has not been done" (24), his character inquires into the colonizer's ideological hold in opposition to the societal desires of self-determination and social mobility. Rizal uses the chapter "At the Philosopher's House" to provide a clear view into Tasio's language use for purposes of decolonization, and demonstrates how he has taken advantage of the "madman" label to uninterruptedly document the colonial situation for future generations. Observing "the philosopher" busily writing in hieroglyphics, Ibarra asks, "In what language are you writing?" Tasio replies: "In ours. Tagalog. [The Egyptian system] works better than the Latin alphabet" (162). The prioritization of language and writing as devices of colonial protest are issues that I argue begin with Tasio, as such means of protest are given further discussion—interestingly enough, by a disguised Ibarra—in *El Filibusterismo*.

The representation of Tasio is further complicated by his moderate class standing, college-level education in philosophy and official title of Don Anastasio, lending to the confused sense of avoidance that he is shown by both the friars and townspeople. Further pitying him for having been widowed as a newlywed, the residents of San Diego decisively evade interaction with him, in response to his unorthodox collection of secular books and willingness to share his "odd ideas" with those interested in knowledge outside of the Church (78). Despite his minimal but memorable presence within the text, he becomes a clear embodiment of the shunning of the Western manifestations of education, and is consequently a very complex literary device to be othered in Rizal's novel.

Structurally, Tasio's literary situation as a minor character in *Touch Me Not* serves as a motif for the colonial marginalization and repression of education presented in the form of non-religious, empirical thought. By embracing his image as an outsider in exchange for solitude with Greek and Roman philosophical texts, he is made an active participant in the aforementioned cycle of ideological repression, not only by the novel's characters but also by Rizal's literary devices. In true form, Tasio embodies Bhabha's "space of the adversarial," which is "neither entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional. It is a pressure and a presence that acts constantly, if unevenly" (152). The application of limits to his character's presence in the novel—to roughly a tenth of the text's sixty chapters—exemplifies the passive rejection that San Diego has bestowed unto its "madman." Pertaining to his character, these physical limitations indicate a clear colonial discouragement against the secular notions of education that Tasio champions. His awareness of his position as an outcast is especially seen in his commentary to Ibarra: "People believe that madness is when you don't think as they do, which is why they take me for a madman. And who knows if they are right? I neither think nor live according to their laws" (164). His ambivalent acceptance of the town's "madman" description of him shows that Tasio knowingly and willingly places himself "on the outside," furthermore "pressuring" the town to acknowledge that he—and, symbolically, Western manifestations of education and progress—exists.

What therefore seems to be a castration of the character's abilities to establish his presence within the text's power structures is not brought to fruition in *Touch Me Not*. Rizal does not carry out a full subjugation of the "philosopher," rather, he artfully ensures that the limited instances of Tasio within the text underscore the character's ignored

position, thus providing further basis for anti-colonial commentary on the indio's oppression. The emphasis placed on his character's irreligious eccentricities to portray his Otherness is reflected in the following verbal exchange with Teodora Viña, the wife of the town's deputy mayor. Regarding the notion of honoring the dead, Tasio firstly broaches his politicized commentary: "I'm no supporter of inherited monarchy...I honor the father for the merit of his son, but I don't honor the son because of the father. Let everyone be rewarded because of what he does, not what others do" (81). In this case, his remark is directly in protest to the imposed notions of purgatory onto the uninformed faithful, yet it also provides an additional critique of the colonial implementation of the "highly racially stratified" sociopolitical caste system in the Philippines "marked in terms of blood mixture...and religious 'civilization'" (Kramer 39). As he speaks to the individualism of personal achievement, he contrasts Teodora's belief of honoring customs. Tasio undermines the postcolonial response of obligation—and thus "civilization" via religious thought—whether to the deceased or living, as a necessary form of tradition dictated by the ideology of the colonizer. Yet Teodora does not comprehend his lucid reasoning, her immediate comeback being that she is "truly upset" with Tasio's choice not to "order a mass" for his deceased wife. In her final and irrelevant counterpoint that "souls wander freely as they await the help of the living, and that one mass [on All Soul's Day]...is worth five on other days of the year, the priest said" (81), Rizal provides solid indication that Tasio—the lone representation of secular reasoning in the town—remains wholly ignored.

Tasio's interaction with Teodora Viña shows that his character's identity is intimately tied to Spivak's conceptualization of the "subaltern." As much as the

philosopher offers verbal support for a Philippines independent of the ideological constraints preventing societal advancement, there is a disconcerting lack of acknowledgement and understanding shown in his character's dialogue. This sense of missing recognition is reminiscent of Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, in which she considers Bhubaneswari's absence in the collective memory of her community (308). Despite both having left evidence of their spoken or written "voice," neither Tasio nor Bhubaneswari's messages are visibly retained by the societies in which they live. Tasio's words are detectable to the reader and to the "subversives" like him—Ibarra and Elías—who also encounter tension from what Spivak calls "colonial social formations" (309). Yet, as seen in his conversation with Teodora, he further adheres to Spivak's "failure of communication," as speech remains unheard, thus connecting to the notion that "All speaking, even seemingly the most immediate, entails a distanced decipherment by another, which is, at best, an interception" (309). Given his location on the outskirts of San Diego, the philosopher—all the way down to his secular book collection—is gradually erased from the consciousness of the town.

An upper-class version of Tasio's pragmatism, Juan Crisóstomo Ibarra's chosen solution for promoting education in the town of San Diego centers on naïve generosity, arising from the assumption that his economic status gives him the ability to override the control of religious authority to fund improved institutions of higher learning. He clings to his socioeconomically advantageous upbringing, riding on the coattails of being able to avoid the racially hierarchical labels of *indio* or *mestizo*, as he has, to reiterate Bhabha's terms, "accepted the colonizer's invitation to identity" (148) in his college education and world travels. His statement to the Captain General of San Diego affirms his desired

inclusion into the colonizer's domain: "Señor, my greatest desire is my country's happiness, a happiness I would like to be owed to the mother country and the efforts of my fellow citizens...What I request is something the government can only give after constant work and specific reforms" (247). Given Fanon's description in his chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* titled "On National Culture" that "new-found tensions [...] present at all stages in the real nature of colonialism have their repercussions on the cultural plane" (192), Ibarra's background and philanthropic approach to societal progress represent an upper-class and Eurocentric self-perception, insofar as the role demands a rejection of the "unrefined" ties to one's indigenous roots.

Ibarra's ego boost is soon dispatched. Upon sharing with Tasio his plans to donate a portion of his wealth for the construction of a school, the philosopher expresses disdain toward an easy reception of such a "noble undertaking." In response, Ibarra declares: "I'm not that pessimistic, nor does life in my own country seem that dangerous. I think such fears are exaggerated, and I hope to bring all my projects to fruition without encountering a great deal of resistance" (165). Such a blatant display of hubris highlights the naïve belief that his accepted identity secures him a political voice, illustrating Said's concept of leaving the "sovereign Western consciousness... unchallenged" as to its design of the "Oriental world" (8). Only because Ibarra is economically comfortable and reaps the benefits of his status within the colonial framework of the Philippines, does he assume that he is politically safe. But by dismissing Tasio's warnings about his "school project," Ibarra furthermore reiterates the philosopher's voiceless position as a subaltern, and also establishes himself under Frantz Fanon's descriptions of the native's growing agitation to either blend in, or move against, colonial authority to receive societal change

(100). From the perspective of Fanon, such a retort points to Ibarra being “overwhelmed” at the prospect of having his “inferiority complex” (100) surface if his school project were to fail. In refusing to believe in the emergence of conflict from his proposed plans, he expresses the unconscious fear of experiencing rejection by the colonizer and thus loses his imagined superiority.

The identity of Rizal’s protagonist is internally and ideologically conflicted, particularly via Ibarra’s desire to be like the colonizer and his confidence that he possesses the “know-how” to exact improvement within his community. Ultimately, Ibarra’s statement to Tasio reflects not only a denial of his position as a subject to the colonial authorities that have kept his Philippine hometown separated from equal access to education and social mobility, but also a refusal to accept his position as a witness to the domineering effects of Spanish oversight. His identity crisis, however, is not unlike that of Rizal’s fellow ilustrados, as explained by Kramer:

As colonial subjects...eager to gain recognition as overseas Spaniards, [ilustrados] would...move uneasily within the boundaries of racist discourses, exemplary of their ‘race’ before the eyes of a curious and skeptical Spanish public, even as they attempted to undermine Spanish racial assumptions. Most overseas ilustrados embraced the role of exemplars: as evidence of the Philippines’ civilization, what better ‘exposition’ than they themselves? As individuals, their educational, literary, and artistic achievement, social graces, manliness and honor would, they believed, bear witness to a broader capacity for assimilation, equal rights, and political participation. (48)

In the role of Kramer’s “exemplar,” Ibarra actively attempts to cast off, or deny, the presence of the indigenous identity. The character is convinced that in being educated abroad and thus being among the most cultured residents of his town, Spanish friars should grant him the same level of “political participation” that Rizal’s contemporaries hoped to attain when they worked to promote anti-colonial discourse abroad. Ultimately,

his inherent location as an indigenous subject further implies Ibarra's inability to attain the Spaniard's attention and respect, leading readers to wonder whether he is indeed capable of successfully "undermining" the colonizer's "racial assumptions" about the indio.

Reiterating his contradictory stances of allegiance to the colonizer, Ibarra is shown vacillating between patriotic attachments toward Spain and the colonized Philippines. The character's conflicted alliances are exemplified in the following melodramatic passage, through which Rizal further destabilizes Ibarra's complex ethnic and national identities:

Ibarra looked away, and there saw Old Manila, surrounded still by its walls and moats, like an anemic young girl wrapped in a dress left over from her grandmother's salad days. "On the one shore is Europe," the young man thought, "Europe, with its beautiful nations continually stirring themselves to action, seeking after happiness, dreaming of many tomorrows... Joyous in the midst of its catastrophes! Yes, and on the other shore of that infinite ocean are the nations of the spirit that though they refuse to condemn material things are still more spiritual than those who boast of adoring the spirit!" (54)

Through a blending of narrative and dialogue, Rizal indicates his protagonist's confusion of identity as seen in Ibarra's disgust toward Old Manila, enamor with Europe, and final hypocritical application of nostalgic appreciation toward the island colony. In his indecisiveness, Ibarra again underscores the relevance of Bhabha's notion of the "doubling, dissembling image...which makes it impossible for the devalued" native "to accept the colonizer's invitation to identity" (148). What seems to be, on Ibarra's part, a deficit of attention toward what he really sees or desires to ideologically see in the Philippines and Europe indicates the "impossibility" of choosing his place within colonial society. In fact, to reflect on the inherited wealth he flaunts, he has never cultivated his sense of identity beyond the colonial education he benefits from, moreover demonstrating



his lack of selfhood despite his socioeconomic status. Such unsettling imagery thus leaves readers aware that the novel's protagonist is slowly becoming, to utilize Fanon's diction, "neurotic," as to be associated—even emotionally—with the perceptibly "anemic" Manila is to cloak himself in the undesirable role of colonial subject. Ibarra's denial is solidly reflected in the optimistic gaze that he applies in assuming the "beauty" of the West.

Despite his overconfidence and blind optimism, Ibarra's willingness to "play along" with Spanish authority as a result of his own identity confusion places him at the most conservative end of a political continuum. At the opposite side of this spectrum is the character Elías, who views himself as having the moral responsibility to exact God's justice; he admits to exposing a plot to assassinate Ibarra, but states that he "let the hand of God kill [Ibarra's assassin]" (221). The revenge he seeks against Spanish authority results from the ruining of his once-established family name, upon the wrongful defamation of his grandfather. Consequently, such deep-seated anger toward colonial authority highlights Rizal's illustration of an ideological clash between Elías and Ibarra, lending to their opposing conceptualizations of societal advancement. Elías' support of vigilantism draws comparisons to Fanon's observation that "from birth, it is clear to [the native] that this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called in question by absolute violence" (31). Having only experienced the colonial government's ability to permanently refuse him opportunities for education and social mobility, Elías is situated directly in the position of the resentful native that Fanon describes, and with such mistreatment arguably rendering him unable to contemplate peaceful means of colonial reform.

Residing under and as a foundation to the familial reasons for Elías' anger is his frustration toward the colonially decided "obliteration" of his self-worth within the power structures of Philippine society. A reflection of Bhabha and Spivak, Rizal's development of the "mysterious boatman" respectively relates to the aforementioned "space of the adversarial" as well as Elías' role as a subaltern in his "failure to communicate." Both elements are exhibited in his situation within the text as a wanted fugitive and—from Ibarra's perspective—Elías straddling of the confused worlds of indio and Spaniard in his educated though impoverished self-representation. But unlike Ibarra, Elías defiantly and resentfully rejects the "colonizer's invitation to identity," as his own experience under colonial oversight is tainted by the crippling permanence of slander in light of absent social mobility.

Elías' jaded outlook is best reflected in the following remark made to Ibarra: "You loved your country because your father taught you to do so, you loved it because you had love there...because everything smiled down on you, because your country never did you any injustices, you loved it because we love anything that makes us happy" (400). However his decision to reject any sense of identity, albeit formed by the status quo, reifies his voiceless and aggrieved position. It thus makes sense that the novel's only advocate of terrorism garners attention not for his ideals but for the violent acts he carries out. Yet, via his influence in the death of a colonially hired assassin in pursuit of Ibarra (216), Spanish authority remains unaware of the boatman as a political revolutionary, seeing nothing ideological beyond what appears to be aimless and indiscriminate terrorism.

Such insatiable resentment draws attention to Elías' suffering as a result of the aftermath of his family's tragic eviction from its comfortable place within the colonial class structure. Here, his anger highlights a distinct connection to Fanon's expression of "patterns of conduct" by the colonizer that "negates the native's culture" and "drives the native more and more to open, organized revolt" (192), as the fixedness of Elías' identity as a subaltern due to his seemingly message-less vengeance only draws him further into his violence-based "voice." While Elías is as intimately connected to the position of subaltern as Tasio, he is only comparable to the philosopher in terms of the fractured delineation between the ideologies he adheres to and the ineffective means by which he believes he is able to make himself known.

Similar to the way in which Tasio indirectly inspires Ibarra's choice to pursue philanthropy as a means of societal progress through education, Elías soon sees in Ibarra the chance to gain an upper-class advocate for those like himself who have been ruined by the cruel influence of Spanish friars in San Diego. In establishing this relationship with Ibarra, he thus hopes to bestow upon himself a sense of political voice sans violence. Reversing Rafael's notion of misrecognition to instead contemplate the ascription of power as the colonizer desires it—the sense that the indio needs the Spaniard—lends to Elías' misrecognition that Ibarra is able to bestow him an easier means to exact revenge, and thus regain lost pride. The compulsion to see within Ibarra what he has been denied by society is reiterated in his statement, "Look at...how I have suffered, and you live, you love, you have money, a home, respect" (354). Having invested in the celebrity of Rizal's protagonist, Elías holds off on his terroristic leanings to avenge his and other families that

suffer the same fate, knowing not to hinder Ibarra's goals to construct the school and less blatantly protest Spanish authority.

Elías indicates his defense of Ibarra's route to societal reform in the following statement to an "old man" who is also desperately contemplating the use of terrorism as a voice against colonial government: "Let's [rely on Ibarra] before we use bloodier means...It must seem odd to you that I, wretched like you, and young and strong, am proposing peaceful measures to you, a weak, old man. But I have seen so much misery, caused as much by us as by these tyrants. It's the defenseless who pay the price" (300). Though Elías' discourse in support of "peaceful measures" points to an objective and rational mindset not previously seen in his impassioned statements to Ibarra, the quote aptly reveals the extent to which all demographics representing the "wretched" of San Diego share the need for an external voice to balance their political silence. Yet in being subalterns, the reliance of Elías and the "old man" on and investment of hope in the Spaniard—in this case, Ibarra—demonstrates the cyclical reiteration of their societal and self-deprecation.

Reconnecting briefly to the notion of Tasio's voiceless situation in the text and the ties to Bhabha, Spivak, and Fanon established between his and the "wretched" characters, Rizal uses these characters to demonstrate similarities to the historical parallels established between women and colonized natives via their shared undervaluing by the white colonizer. In *Spanish Women and the Colonial Wars of the 1890s*, D. J. Walker evaluates late-19<sup>th</sup> century political commentary by Peninsular Spanish women and contextualizes the group's social disadvantages as creating sympathy for the colonial subject, as "by the end of the century...advocates of workers realized that women and

workers”—regardless of origin and caste—“would have to agitate for change in the way they were viewed and treated” (74). In previous being “unheard,” the willingness of women to attempt to find their voice through the external platform of journalistic writing is reminiscent of the search of Rizal’s characters for similar means to gain attention.

In this sense, *Touch Me Not* is a multilayered exhibit of Walker’s perspective toward “being heard,” as the genre of literary fiction lends Rizal another means to political voice, and both Tasio and Elías separately utilize Ibarra to garner exposure for theirs. In his book, *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines*, Rafael defends reconsidering the novel as providing a political voice for the subalterned Rizal and the writer’s equally subalterned characters in the following reflection of the text’s impact on nationalist discourse:

Scholars have referred to the novel as a ‘charter of nationalism’ in that ‘it calls on the Filipino to recover his self-confidence.’ The recovery of ‘self-confidence’ is the substance of the book that is debatable. The fact however, remains: its *call* has never stopped. Reaching beyond the time of its writing, it has continued to circulate in a future it could never have anticipated. This is perhaps what makes [*Touch Me Not*] a literary work: its capacity to exceed the historical conditions of its production rather than simply mirror them. For this reason we might say that the novel escapes the failure it describes. (78)

In this case, “self-confidence,” as described by Rafael, and not the desire for voice, best articulates within the text what Tasio, Ibarra, and Elías aspire to gain for Philippine society through the introduction of Western ideas of education. The “call” of each character to defend ideologically disparate answers to the question of progress addresses the usage of language a means of conveying national identity, to which M. K. Flynn enhances Rafael’s observations by asking: “the emphasis here is not on what nationalism *is* but rather on what it does: how is it fashioned and refashioned according to the circumstances of the time?” (3). Returning to Tasio’s presence in *Touch Me Not* as the

novel's sole voice of reason, and accordingly, the notion that the philosopher has relinquished the ability to serve as a reputable advocate for societal change, suggests Tasio's situation as Bhabha's Other is not dissimilar to that of the text, as both indicate an imbuelement of "flux and agony" (148).

By separating himself from actively inciting progress—as Rizal does from decisive political commentary through the text's genre and aesthetics—the opposing Ibarra and Elías are thrust into the spotlight instead. This moment is captured when Tasio is found writing in hieroglyphics to document the actions of the "destructive priest class," to which Ibarra inquires about his unusual mode of recordkeeping. The philosopher replies:

I'm not writing for this generation, I'm writing for the ages. If [anyone] could read these [notes], I would burn my books... The generation that can decipher these characters will be an educated generation. It will understand me and say, 'In the nights of our grandparents, not everyone was asleep.' (162)

As a passing of the baton, Tasio and Rizal respectively argue that the indigenous community must find a way to assert its agency and choice within colonial society. Ibarra and Elías are asked to choose how they will "decipher" Tasio, in the same way that ilustrados and readers of Rizal's era are also confronted with the problems of attempting to design and apply—what are, in actuality—anti-colonial ideals for the appearance of an advanced Philippines sans Spanish rule. Through Tasio's hope in gleaning a sense of understanding from "an educated generation" assumedly uninfluenced by their "grandparents'" colonial environment, Rizal slyly refuses any reconciliation of these opposing stances on social reform.

If my "goal" should be, in Said's words, "to reveal the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his work is a

contribution” (23-4), this evaluation of Tasio, Ibarra, and Elías remains an all-too-brief “work in progress” as I endeavor to illuminate Rizal’s message. Even without consideration given to my cultural ties to the text, Rizal’s literary rendition of the Philippines under Spanish rule is clearly imbued with difficult questions about the relationship between the people’s lack of progress and their position as subjects under colonial control. Despite having begun an invasive exploration of three of his characters, this exposition on progress within *Touch Me Not* underscores the challenges of “unpacking” the subtleties of Rizal’s heavily political discourse.

The responses of Ibarra and Elías as extensions of Tasio’s ideological bravery suggest Rizal’s own attempt at experimentation and supposition with answers to colonial reform. Since their stances toward the abstraction of the ideology vary so widely, Rizal implies through them that he too remains unconvinced as to how education, and thus societal progress, should be brought about. Yet, these characters mark crucial initial moments for their writer’s development and refining of his own political stances, which are most decisively communicated upon the revealing of Ibarra’s return in *El Filibusterismo*. This ambivalence toward these hypotheses of colonial discourse for societal change is finally underscored in one of Tasio’s last remarks: “One can be progressive in three ways: forward, to the side, and backward. The first of these lead, the second allow themselves to be led, and the last are dragged along... Nowadays we in the Philippines walk three centuries behind the cart, we have barely emerged from the Middle Ages” (347). Despite showing his contemporaries a humiliating mirror, Rizal again chooses not to communicate even the slightest reconciliation of these opposing stances, or allude to any of them as being the best solution.

Perhaps in deliberately offering diverse avenues of change through these characters, *Touch Me Not* offers encouragement to subversives like himself, as well as a warning, about what it means to “lead the cart.” In leaving his readers to grapple with Ibarra and Elías’ differing interpretations for Tasio’s pioneering visions for their society, Rizal accentuates the risk of acting on the desire to forcefully bring the Philippines out of its three-century delay into modernity.



CHAPTER TWO: RIZAL AS CARICATURIST: ILLUSTRATING SPANISH  
COLONIAL INFLUENCE VIA DISTORTION AND THE GROTESQUE IN *TOUCH  
ME NOT*

For Rizal's Tasio, Ibarra and Elías, the identity of the indigenous subject is especially fragile when it attempts to undermine Spanish colonial ideals or leverage socioeconomic standing to incite societal change. The colonized, upon committing either type of deviance, is forcibly halted in his goals and removed from the plot of *Touch Me Not* via an untimely death or in exchange for accepting the furtive lifestyle of a fugitive. Such authorial silencing comes during the final and climactic moments of the novel in the forms of Tasio's death at the entrance of his own home, Ibarra's necessitated escape from San Diego's law enforcement, and Elías' self-sacrificial death to ensure Ibarra's survival.

I underscore my observation that Rizal does not show the Spanish colonizer in the act of silencing its own colonized subjects; rather, the expectations established by colonial oversight contributes to each character's inability to thrive. In this sense, his move to render his male indigenous characters both powerless and silent—whether through death or threat of arrest—reflects the normalcy of punishing all attempts to exercise power and voice. Published in three installments in his fellow *ilustrados'* Madrid-based periodical *La Solidaridad*, Rizal's 1890 exposition, "The Indolence of the Filipino," expresses frustration toward the hegemonic conditioning and reiteration of the indio's socioeconomic oppression:

What is there strange in it, when we see the pious but important friars...advising [poor parishioners] to stop work in the mines, to abandon their commerce, to break up their looms? Man works for an object. Remove the object and you reduce him to inaction. The most active man in the world will fold his arms from the instant he understands that it is madness to bestir himself, that this work will cause him trouble, that for him, it will be the cause of vexations at home and of the pirate's greed abroad.

As a threat to its colonizer's ideologically elevated position, Rizal emphasizes that the Philippine subject's inclinations to emerge from "inaction" is consistently punished by Spanish leadership, a theme reiterated via the literary proponents of education in *Touch Me Not*. Unlike Tasio and Elías, Ibarra worked for his "object" openly, and sought political dialogue with colonial authorities during the process. Consequently, of all the insults and injuries that the Spanish government inflicted onto the novel's indigenous characters, the destruction of Ibarra's school most directly illustrates Rizal's point that their abandonment of productivity perpetuates their subjugation, while the reclaiming of an "object" for which to work justifies severe punishment. But the most tragic of these, from Rizal's perspective, is that the Filipino has been conditioned against personal achievement and self-sufficiency.

This discouragement of achievement connects not only to the concept of Spivak's voice-oppressed subaltern, but also to Fanon's argument in *Black Skin, White Masks* that "every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation" (18). Aside from their economically disparate backgrounds, Tasio and Ibarra employ language—whether written or spoken—in support of education and societal progress to distance the Philippines from Spain's colonial power structures. Tasio encrypts his essays written in the indigenous language Tagalog into Egyptian

hieroglyphics, while Ibarra relies on his European education to maneuver into San Diego politics. But the gradual intellectual elevation of the indio “makes [the indio] whiter as he renounces his blackness” (18). Rizal recognizes this issue of indigenous identity presentation as a problematic one within Spanish colonial society, especially when influenced by or altered through one’s learning or socioeconomic background. The prospect of social mobility via the process of “renouncing” the “original” identity, since made inferior by the “civilizing nation,” is a consequently unsettling one for these aforementioned characters.

In reading the textual interruption and removal of his literary supporters of education as signifying his awareness of Spain’s tradition of colonial subjugation, Rizal also projects a very clear message about the same political framework via illustrations of indigenous women. Unlike the aforementioned male characters’ deviant attempts to incite political reform, Rizal’s indigenous female characters demonstrate their complicity to colonial power structures, aesthetically valuing their colonizers’ projected image and identity as both ideal. Without close examination of the text, his readership might misunderstand these characters’ participation and acceptance of “the colonizers’ entire system of values, attitudes...and most importantly, mode of production” or what Abdul JanMohamed calls the “hegemonic” phase of colonialism (62). Such a reading suggests that they should enjoy increased success and inclusion within Spanish colonial society in the Philippines. These women—of whom I will examine two due to their shared indigenous origins and comparable behaviors within *Touch Me Not*’s colonial power structures—are fascinated by, and arguably obsessed with attaining and maintaining a Spanish appearance. Consequently, they attempt to “renounce” their “blackness” through

the forced acquisition and presentation of a European identity, and much like the male characters of the previous chapter, encounter similar challenges in doing so. These varied failures to abandon their indigenous locations—whether politically or physically—additionally calls attention to their immobility under Spanish oversight.

But both male and female colonized subjects seek more than base recognition from their colonizer, as all of these indigenous characters make every attempt—however misguided or naïve—toward full inclusion and equality within their society. Ultimately, they both fail to assert themselves verbally and physically, and thus remain in a position of deviance from the Spanish colonizer. It is for this reason that I follow my first chapter with a close examination of Rizal’s minor female characters, Doña Victorina and Doña Consolación, since their insatiable desire for identity-based inclusion into colonial power structures is perverted into the grotesque. I am especially interested in the connection between identity presentation and the indigenous’ struggle to establish an acceptable presence within colonial society, in light of Rizal’s punishment-driven treatment of the Philippine native in *Touch Me Not*. In gesturing their attempts to achieve whiteness through their marriages to Spaniards and adoption of European behaviors and fashion, the indigenous Victorina and Consolación nonetheless reaffirm the impermeable boundaries between the colonizer and the subjugated.

I spent my childhood in constant observation and awe of my artistically talented father, whose training in graphic design but lack of a college education taught me to admire the work ethic of blue-collar professions, and especially value the importance of blending personal enjoyment and pursuits in my own work. When I was in grade school, his lifelong pastime of drawing his favorite Stan Lee comic book characters led him to

discover another aptitude: portraiture. Whenever he is not assembling or repairing Oahu's freeway signage for Hawaii's Department of Transportation, my father enjoys spending many of his weekends moonlighting as a caricaturist for social events.

Yet, the cartoonish renderings he produces of willing subjects do not result in the kinds of gross distortions that typify caricature art. My father half-jokingly states that he specializes in "selling vanity," since his artistic decisions aim to lessen or completely ignore, rather than emphasize, his subjects' less aesthetically pleasing physical attributes. But whereas my father prioritizes favorable illustrations of his subjects, Rizal seeks the opposite effect. What results in *Touch Me Not* is the severe inversion of Spanish perceptions of beauty via Victorina and Consolación, women whose obsessions with assuming Fanon's notion of whiteness instead perverts their colonially favorable presentations. By extension, the novel additionally demonstrates a rejection of the colonizer as seen through these characters' unnatural fixations on the Spanish image and subsequent degeneration.

As Victorina and Consolación each embody physical and behavioral grotesqueness in their endless pursuits of relinquishing their indigenous origins to adopt Spanish identities, Rizal's calculated illustrations effectively twist colonial personas and societal norms into subjects not of desire and envy, but of disgust and horror. This issue of the abject resulting from imitation particularly aligns with Bhabha's contention that "mimicry is constructed around ambivalence... that in order to be effective, it must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (86). Clearly unable to convincingly adopt their Eurocentric roles, these indigenous women further distort the already-parodied treatment of their intended "object" of whiteness via the Spanish image.

As Bhabha phrases it in his essay “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” their eagerness to “normalize the colonial state or subject” by rejecting their inherent identities is rightfully “profound and disturbing,” because in attempting to “produce another knowledge of norms” (86) both Victorina and Consolación are bound to do so inadequately. Such “slippage” thus brings attention to my aforementioned argument for his generation’s nationalistic craving for an ethnic identity not shaped by Western oversight and influence.

Readers of *Touch Me Not* are introduced to Victorina three chapters after Consolación, but in privileging Rizal’s use of narrative to distort these characters and denote his anti-colonial commentary, Victorina is a preferable character to initiate an analysis of the fraudulent Spanish identity because she lacks the sociopathic inclinations that otherwise complicate Consolación. Victorina’s vanity and naïveté override her mean-spiritedness toward residents of San Diego, making her a comical and truer “caricature” of the colonizer. Furthermore, her exaggerated lack of fashion sense and improper use of the Spanish language are traits that underscore her position as an entertainingly unsuccessful imposter within colonial class structures. Consolación, on the other hand, requires added attention via her roles in *Touch Me Not* as both the abused and abuser. She is rendered a postcolonial Other and subaltern not only through a grotesque appearance and lack of language use similar to that of Victorina, but specifically in terms of her violent relationship with her Spanish husband and interactions with Sisa, a mentally ill resident of the town. Whether analyzed in isolation or positioned in direct comparison to one another, both female characters embody Bhabha’s “menacingly” incomplete representations of the “ambivalent” Spanish colonial image and exhibit traits of Spivak’s

subaltern. Thus it is via their reliance on appearance and action, rather than dialogue, through which each character attempts to assert a sense of control over her identity.

Rizal's forty-second chapter of *Touch Me Not*, titled "The de Espadañas," is dedicated to introducing Victorina and her Spanish husband, the crippled Tiburcio, a quack doctor. Clearly interested in highlighting the couple's physical and moral degeneration, Rizal draws attention to her lack of fashion sense and her husband's physical defects. With Tiburcio described as "unhappy, with the look of an old man...lacking brains, money, and references" whose own "countrymen, in order to get rid of him, advised him to go to [the Philippines] and pass himself off as a medical doctor" (278-9), readers are reminded that the aging Victorina "had to be contented with the poor man" (278). This is because, in agreement with Fanon, his proposal allowed her to finally receive "recognition, incorporation into a group that seemed hermetic. The feeling of insignificance...totally vanished" (58). At last, Victorina feels empowered to relinquish her dismally "insignificant" indigenous image, and she quickly works toward achieving that goal by additionally fabricating her own colonial "invitation to identity." Tiburcio, bearing an equally fraudulent socioeconomic identity but the ethnic labeling of Spaniard and "white man," justifies and motivates his wife's efforts toward social mobility, revealing that her goal to obtain the Spanish identity is an entirely egocentric one.

Although less concerned with her husband's disabilities than she is with the imagined social benefits she will gain through marrying him, Victorina "would have preferred a less lame Spaniard, less halting of speech, less bald, less gap-toothed... But such a class of Spaniard never approached her to ask for her hand" (280). Thus, in line

with Fanon's argument that "one is white as one is rich, as one is beautiful, as one is intelligent" (51-2), Victorina's "constant preoccupation with attracting the attention of the white man" and "seeking admittance into a white sanctuary" (50-1) is furthermore reflected in the class standing she attempts to assume immediately following her marriage. Since she inherently cannot be "admitted," Rizal depicts her attempt to fabricate her own "admission" into colonial power structures through the formation of their public image as a couple, as she spends their income on "the best tailors of the city," and "carriages and luggage" (282). Whereas the physically undesirable but nonetheless Spanish Tiburcio remains statically unattractive and reliant on Victorina's initiative to attain and maintain his affluent appearance, she works in excess to project their wealth to the rest of San Diego. Her desire to "show off her husband in the most public of places" (282) addresses Tiburcio's objectification as a trophy of her acquired whiteness, a sentiment that further inverts their "Eurocentric" relationship by effeminizing his passivity.

Connecting the couple's reversed power dynamics to Bhabha's concept of mimicry as a "sign of the inappropriate" (86), Rizal's narrator subtly points to what is amiss or "slipping" from the European norm when describing the de Espadañas, and especially Victorina, the ethnicity-based imposter. For instance, her flamboyance via such outfits as "a silk gown with embroidered flowers and a hat with a large parrot on it, which was half-crushed by blue and red ribbons" is already aesthetically presented in the mode of the grotesque (277). Language such as "half-crushed," as well as the narrator's observation that "road dust, mixed with the rice powder on her cheeks, seemed to exaggerate her wrinkles" (277) and invoke the unappealing nature of Victorina's



appearance. Furthermore, the rice powder—in spite of its role in claiming physical whiteness—exaggerates the features she seeks to hide, and works instead to expose her as a fraud. I quote Bhabha here, since I agree that such grotesque language to describe Victorina’s fraudulent identity also emphasizes how “the very emergence of the ‘colonial’ [...] depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure” (86). Although remaining convinced that she is “recognizable” to the colonizer as an equal, her clothing and makeup are little more than artificial additives to an originally indigenous body, used as a canvas. Drawing closer to the colonizer through the glorification of her husband’s fraudulent medical practice and her own wardrobe has achieved little for Victorina. Instead, her distorted imitation of the Spaniard evokes the same disdainful reactions that the proponents of education each experience.

Aside from her deluded conviction that money and marriage granted her wealth and identity, Victorina remains heavily narcissistic via her character’s clear amnesia toward her cultural origins. Her assumed superiority and distance from the indigenous community is best revealed in her statement: “Most likely, I’ll never come back to this land of savages...I wasn’t born to live here” (283). Victorina is already ridiculed through her absurd and horrifying fashion sense and extravagant spending habits, but Rizal utilizes these behaviors to emphasize her more troubling denial of her indigenous identity:

In her youth, she had been pretty...and the mere contemplation of herself enthralled her. She now looked with disdain on her many Filipino admirers: her aspirations lay in another race. She had refused to bestow her diminutive white hand on just anyone, but not for lack of trust. (278)

Whether established “in her youth” or developed in response to her opportune marriage to Tiburcio, Victorina’s narcissistic “aspirations” and unquestioned refusal to interact

with her “Filipino admirers” reiterates her character’s location within JanMohamed’s hegemonic phase. Beyond internalizing her “disdain” for her own community, she vastly simplifies and combines identity with location: “Doña Victorina’s geography divided the world into the Philippines and Spain, like the ignoramuses who divide it into Spain and America, or China by some other name” (283). In pairing her remarks with the narrator’s generous scathing descriptions, Rizal makes her arrogance laughable to readers, for her embarrassment toward “the land of savages” has rendered her an equally embarrassing sight to the colonizer. As he reframes her vanity and conceit from the cartoonish to the abject, her chosen closed-mindedness toward her own culture signals, beyond base conceit, a tragic symptom of her lack of stable identity.

Whereas nonsensicality firstly aims to lighten Victorina’s superficiality and Spanish lack, Rizal allows resentment to saturate the physical and ideological spaces that Doña Consolación occupies. In fact, occupation, rather than forced presence in the community, separates the two female characters, despite their shared experience of making contact with the colonial identity through marriages to Spanish men. While Victorina forces her public image onto the rest of San Diego via her determination to purchase visual impressions of their falsified status, Consolación bears the dark and dual identities of aggressor and victim in her household. As a more sinister representation of Rizal’s anti-colonial commentary, her attempt to attain whiteness through an abusive marriage to a “poor Spanish corporal” ultimately transforms her into a subaltern via a true loss of linguistic memory but heightened distortion of physical appearance. In “keeping from knowing Tagalog,” but receiving constant beatings from her husband for poor pronunciation of Castilian, she is described as having lost the ability to speak both,

eventually taking “to a sort of language of gestures” (259). Thus language and environment each play a crucial role in denoting power structures for Consolación, who in response to—or out of habit from—her continually violent language lessons, is compelled to then abuse San Diego’s psychologically frail “madwoman,” Sisa.

However, in order to locate her linguistic regression and removal from the indigenous identity as these characteristics are fueled through the perpetuation of violence, Consolación and her home must be reexamined as microcosmic sites of colonization, since it is through marriage that she gains access to the colonizer and thereafter loses her ability to speak. These textual details of setting and description align with Benedict Anderson’s remark in *Imagined Communities* that such “profound changes in consciousness...bring with them characteristic amnesias” (204), and help to affirm how Consolación is ironically “estranged” from civilization in an unkempt home and equally frazzled appearance, elements reflecting her cultivated penchant for violence. The narrator of *Touch Me Not* immediately and ominously opens the 39<sup>th</sup> chapter with questions of her severe environment and equally austere appearance. In doing so, the latter is rendered a grotesque exhibition that must be hidden from public view:

Why are the windows of the ensign’s house shut up tight? Will Doña Consolación have understood how disagreeable her brow is, marbled with thick veins...and a thick cigar a fitting complement to her purple lips? Did her envious expression cede to a generous impulse not to disturb the gathering’s happiness by her appearance? (255)

Rizal decisively evokes disgust and horror in describing only her unnaturally distorted facial features and a cigar, a narrative move that builds reader suspense and hesitations toward the character before she either speaks or is more fully illustrated. Consolación is sequestered from the community in almost the same way as Tasio, but the former’s

isolation is a result of her unsettling appearance rather than her education level. With “tightly shut” windows that encapsulate her “disagreeable” presence, I cannot help but notice that her character’s introduction is an alarming antithesis to Victorina’s heavily parodied narcissism in the novel. The comical extravagance of Rizal’s other female “Spaniard” is tolerable in comparison to Consolación’s immediately ominous entrance into *Touch Me Not*.

The difference in descriptive language to identify Consolación’s malevolent appearance is again reflected in the chapter’s opening. Here, Rizal further elaborates on the gothic nature of the “lady of the house” at rest in her otherwise decrepit domestic space:

A weak light illuminates the mess of a main room...spiderwebs have taken up residence there, where dust has encrusted them. The lady of the house, befitting her general indolence, dozes in a wide armchair. She is dressed as she is everyday, which is to say, badly, horribly...the blue flannel blouse set over one that was supposed to be white, and a fraying skirt that shows off her thin, flat thighs, one situated atop the other, and shaking violently. (255)

At this point in the text, Rizal underscores the remnants of Spanish opulence and order as indicative of the degeneration of Consolación’s household. Her neglected living room and “frayed” and discolored clothing both reflect a lengthy and consequently tragic deterioration of the character’s physical and psychological wellbeing; furthermore, her body movements evoke the unnatural, as her leg “violently” shakes while she is asleep. Yet, to add further morbidity to the dilapidated setting and its inhabitant, the “encrusted” spider webs present throughout the room suggest that she, too, may eventually be entombed there as well. The grotesque normalcy that Rizal establishes in this scene leads me to currently read her character’s physical and moral deterioration as a result of her

long-term exposure to the colonial identity, not only her position as both a victim and perpetrator of physical abuse.

Although Rizal places emphasis on Consolación's grotesqueness via her ever-worsening appearance, he uses narrative to sarcastically highlight the continuance of the abuse cycle she endures via her Spanish husband's brutal language lessons. In reading her physical and psychological state as a reflection of Fanon's argument that "hate is not inborn; it has to be constantly cultivated, to be brought into being," which "demands existence, [for] he who hates has to show his hate in appropriate actions and behavior" (53), her husband must be examined for literally beating his wife into the position of a subaltern and instilling her inclination to abuse others. The Spanish corporal, remaining unnamed in the novel and referred to only via his military rank, constantly beats Consolación in their home, and threatens to "send her back to her village" whenever she requests to leave their home:

He understood that his wife dressed ridiculously...and that it was not in his best interest to let her be exposed to the stares of either the town fathers or outsiders... The corporal, even if he was a poor philologist, was, on the other hand, a good husband... [Every] lesson ended in punches, scratching, and slaps. [He] could see her linguistic progress, and calculated his wife would lose all use of words. (259)

Given her rapid loss of speaking ability within the early years of her marriage, the corporal's successful subjugation of Consolación demonstrates, albeit in a completely dysfunctional manner, the need of the "woman of color" to minimally "join the white world" regardless of risk or sacrifice (58). Disturbingly, she is more willing to be beaten than to endure the shame of eviction from "the white sanctuary" (50). But as Michel Foucault writes in *Discipline and Punish*, it is "ugly to be punishable, but there is no glory in punishing" (10). While Consolación's location within her home by extension

reflects her inherent position as an indigenous woman in colonial Philippines, so too does her husband's behavior clearly reflect the familiarity of the oppressive colonizer.

Thus her redirecting of the abuse she experiences onto the defenseless Sisa, a mentally ill *india*, is an attempt to reclaim control over her loss of linguistic identity. The sadistic pleasure Consolación gains in beating Sisa into singing in Tagalog suggests a twisted attempt to assert dominion over one who has retained the clarity of her voice, though not her sanity. This oppression-based lack of identity—and consequent obsession to subjugate a more socially-inferior individual—is further reaffirmed by Fanon, insofar as “the black man,” or in Consolación's case, the non-Spaniard, seeks “to overcome his feeling of insignificance...he is full of rage because he feels small, he suffers from inadequacy in all human communication, and all these factors chain him with an unbearable insularity” (50). When Consolación's husband denies her the opportunity to leave their home, she reroutes her “rage” by demanding, in her broken Spanish, that Sisa be summoned to entertain her, one of the few instances in which the first's requests are heard and fulfilled.

Although suddenly empowered through her ability to command the “madwoman” into singing, Consolación is unsurprisingly enraged by Sisa's choice of song, which includes the lyric: “The faded flower...seeking applause and full of vanity, makes an effort to raise its withered petals” (260). Her immediate reaction to the song is to speak fluently in Tagalog, and Consolación “shrieked,” exclaiming: “I can't stand those lyrics” and thus “exposing herself” as an *india* to both her husband's orderly and Sisa, who finally clearly understands Consolación (260). Rizal artfully illustrates to his reader the enduring presence of the “Spanish” woman's ethnic origins, despite Consolación's

conscious attempt to forget Tagalog entirely. Although her husband's constant abuse seemingly indicated a complete loss of linguistic identity, the writer clarifies that such "amnesia" is not as permanent as it seemed, given her instinctive response in her actual native language. But this moment of shame is short-lived. Consolación does not wallow in her failure, but yet again, reroutes her emotion back to "anger and hatred" (261), whereupon she changes her order to Sisa and maniacally commands in Spanish: "Dance, dance, you damn wretch! Damn the mother who gave birth to you! Dance or I'll beat you to death" (261). She relishes the opportunity in which she can finally degrade another human being, in the same way that she herself has so habitually been treated. Through simplistic imitation of her husband, and thus the colonizer, Consolación convinces herself of her attained whiteness.

Rizal's "Spanish" women parody problematizes the colonizer's identity as an ideal, fully showcasing the anxiety of receiving an invitation to Fanon's notion of a "white sanctuary," and perhaps more importantly, the problem of inadequately meeting the expectations of the "white world." In her article, "The Comedy of Domination: Psychoanalysis and the Conceit of Whiteness," Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks points out that "the ruse of whiteness is only a performance—not the essence—of authority; that as a color whiteness is but one element in a series of differences and...cannot constitute a stable presence" (371). Despite their efforts, their obviously exaggerated attempts to fully embrace a Spanish identity are off the mark; both Victorina and Consolación are unable to convincingly adopt and "perform" the personas that they seek. Furthermore, their behavior renders them Other to both the indigenous and Spanish community alike. As the women are made spectacles through their physical appearances, so too do they

unknowingly attract unwanted attention and shame, and not the “beauty and intelligence” they believe that they possess. In the end, fabricating “whiteness” where it does not inherently exist is not easy, leading only toward further instability and “difference.”

Said completes his introduction to *Orientalism* by reiterating that his efforts to maintain a “critical consciousness” toward reexamining the Orient nevertheless return to issues of his own personal investment in the subject (25-6). To this end Said quotes Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*, reminding us of the Italian philosopher’s argument of ““knowing thyself” as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory...therefore it is imperative to compile such an inventory” (25). This is a sentiment that I cannot ignore in studying Rizal, because although I can temporally and ideologically isolate myself from his novels and continue to discuss my position as a product of the West, I recognize that I am not fully able to disassociate with the society that he writes to critique. If I were to make a conscious effort to achieve this sense of disassociation from my Filipino heritage, I too would be practicing Fanon’s “renunciation,” and undoubtedly struggle to genuinely adopt whichever new identity I so desired. Thus Victorina and Consolación’s fears of finding a clear and acceptable location within their society—and the larger Western world—are not far from my reality, or those of Rizal’s continued readership.



CHAPTER THREE: THE YOUTH AWAKENS: CONVERSATIONS OF NATIONAL  
IDENTITY FROM *TOUCH ME NOT* TO *EL FILIBUSTERISMO*

In comparing the desires of the education supporters with those of the vain Doñas, it is apparent that Rizal produces a fractured Philippine society showcasing a developing lack of unity. Regardless of how practical or superficial their endeavors are, more troubling is the text's emphasis on the characters' rapidly dissolving agency and control over their desired colonial identities and societal positions. These indigenous characters are instead led to recognize their inherent reliance on the Spaniard's approval within the colonial microcosm of San Diego; however, it is important to note that these groups differ most evidently in their perceptions of and responses to these limited and suppressed societal roles.

The supporters of education, Tasio, Ibarra, and Elías, all receive proof of their inability to exercise political voice or influence, thus becoming embittered by their failures and driven to unconnected and unsuccessful forms of political protest. Since these three characters work in isolation from one another, readers are reminded again of the indios' lack of unity under a single anti-colonial movement. But when Rizal withholds a solution for reform in *Touch Me Not*, we lose the political clarity and motive behind their respective acts of protest. Readers instead see an elderly philosopher writing in seclusion, a philanthropist pursued by Spanish colonial authorities, and a disheveled boatman developing a terrorist plot in retaliation for his family's ruined reputation by Church officials. We see three male characters exiled and ostracized. Nevertheless, these

characters remain hopeful of the Philippines' eventual societal progress, however such reforms subsequently arise.

Oppositely, Victorina celebrates her obsession for attaining the guise of the colonial power and, demonstrative of her failure to "enter the colonizer's domain," is mocked for her poor attempts to emulate Spanish decadence. And through her dysfunctional marriage, Consolación's fabricated Spanish identity is skewed further than the gaudy Victorina, when the abused housewife is psychologically relocated to the role of the subaltern. Nonetheless, similarly to Tasio, Ibarra, and Elías' initiatives for progress, Victorina and Consolación demonstrate both an attempted assertion of agency and decision-making toward identity. Recognizing these indios' efforts to declare their presence to the colonizer, I underscore their bravery and determination in remaining constant to their anti-colonial choices, unpopular or unsuccessful as these decisions are.

It is worth contemplating that such a fractured society is troubling for the processes needed to unite its colonial subjects under a singular anti-colonial mission. As such, this chapter will examine the textual transformation of the college-age Filipino away from a desire for inclusion and disinterest in his or her indigenous origins, to an assertion of "totality" via confrontations with and about the Spanish colonizer. I will demonstrate how the illustration of educated indios in *El Filibusterismo* matches Fanon's observation that after "the colonial power increases its demands...and takes fewer pains to mask the hold it has over the government," the natives "stagnate deplorably in unbearable poverty" but eventually "awaken to the unutterable treason of their leaders" (135). While Ibarra's energy and political ambitions are treated as forms of naïveté in *Touch Me Not*, the college students of Rizal's second novel are simply tired of navigating

Spain's expectations, whether in the classroom or as they attempt, with varying success, to begin their careers. To begin discussing the evident change in the writer's political clarity and the indigenous subject's exit from voicelessness, I have chosen to pursue conversations in the text that demonstrate the encouraged formation of a national Filipino identity.

However, in recognition of the historically complex relationship between Spain and the Philippines, I will also use this chapter to move toward increased specificity in my usage of the labels "colonizer" and "colonial authorities." The verbal confrontations illustrated between teachers and students in *El Filibusterismo* provide not necessarily more of the larger "Spanish" perspective, but more specifically, that of the Spanish friar. While the source of hegemonic control is communicated more generally in *Touch Me Not* to showcase the corruption of both Spain's religious and government officials—hence my continued grouping of the two—I also agree with Vicente L. Rafael's observations in his book, *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines*, that Spanish friars maintained "considerable power" in the Philippines, in contrast to their lack of influence and loss of holdings in Latin American colonies (9). Rafael further describes the friars' belief in their responsibility "as patriotic Spaniards...to preserve what was left of the empire," a role that allowed them to "act as bulwarks against the threats of foreign influences and ideas" and "encourage the repression of various calls for reform" (9). In *El Filibusterismo*, the colonizer's attitudes of entitlement are finally given direct questioning.

Since Rizal again introduces a new plethora of characters to his second novel, my analyses will focus on Basilio and his discussions with the mysterious but middle-aged

salesman named Simoun before transitioning to brief but heated exchanges between the indigenous students Plácido and Isagani and their Spanish instructors. These three separate conversations between educated indios and their elders demonstrate Rizal's increasingly solidifying commentary on the Philippines' struggle to progress in the presence of colonial antiquity. But whereas Plácido and Isagani appear victorious in their debates with Spanish friars, Basilio—a minor child character in *Touch Me Not* that uniquely achieves class mobility in *El Filibusterismo*—is not yet fully aware of his generation's discontent. Unlike other students already initiated into nationalistic thinking and the behaviors of a political subversive—as seen via his peers Plácido and Isagani—it is only after Basilio's successful navigation of colonial society that he meets with the cunning Simoun and is led to his own political “awakening.” Just as stylistic changes between both novels' narratives and time frames help to denote the writer's formerly incomplete anti-colonial assertions, his character serves as an especially crucial unifying thread to connect Rizal's texts.

In making these textual observations, I point out that Rizal's negative encounters with Spanish authorities during the four-year gap between his novels' publications heavily influenced the straightforwardness of *El Filibusterismo*. During this timeframe, he and fellow *ilustrados* discovered and protested the use of Igorots (a collective term for several ethnic groups living in mountainous areas of the northern Philippines) as a live exhibit in Madrid's Zoological Gardens in 1887 (Salman 154), while both religious and government officials continued to harass his family in response to the widespread popularity of *Touch Me Not* (Augenbraum xiii). I cannot help but agree with Salman and Augenbraum's observations that these encounters, as unpleasant as only my imagination

can make them, assisted Rizal's own ideological clarifications in completing his "continuation" to *Touch Me Not*. Cruelly echoing the injustices illustrated in his first novel, the dehumanization of Rizal's own relatives in Manila and fellow countrymen abroad are unsurprisingly embittering events for a writer as recent a college graduate as that of his fictional activist Isagani.

As Rizal's experiences connect to the aforementioned naiveté associated with Ibarra's youth and socioeconomic positioning in *Touch Me Not*, so too do their realizations of colonial injustices and inherently lower status within Spain's racial hierarchies embolden their beliefs in the formation of both the national and individual Filipino identity. In struggling to cope with the unfairness of his philanthropic project's demise, Ibarra is finally made aware of the hardships that all "less than Spanish" subjects experience within colonial society. Just as he finally understands and is able to relate to Elías' anger and resentment, Ibarra is forced to escape from Spanish authorities before his sudden removal from the novel's plot. Ibarra's moment of realization aligns with Bhabha's "space of splitting," given that in order to sympathize with Elías' misfortunes he must acknowledge "the tethered shadow" of ethnic otherness that has garnered him such harsh punishment.

Additionally, by interrupting Ibarra's bildungsroman trajectory from idealistic student to empowered advocate, Rizal hesitates to maintain the character's position as the central protagonist of *Touch Me Not* and—for that matter—morally "better than" Elías. Consequently, I argue that the sudden ending of Ibarra's presence in the first novel is a site of Rizal's early frustrations surrounding societal reform and nationalist discourse. This lack of resolution in the first novel, in turn, bridges the texts by explaining how

Basilio, a minor character and child in the plot of *Touch Me Not*, is empowered for political action in *El Filibusterismo*.

While his character is given little attention in *Touch Me Not* aside from the physical abuse he receives from friars in his bell-ringing duties for the church, the college-aged Basilio in *El Filibusterismo* represents a balance between Ibarra and Elías' characters; not only does he bear a colonially stigmatized reputation as the only surviving son of the mentally ill Sisa, but his perseverance—and arguably luck—ultimately earn him the respect of his college professors and peers. His educational growth from a “little country boy who didn’t know a word of Spanish” and whose “tattered clothes became a spectacle” (44) to competence in fourth-year Latin at a Dominican-run secondary school fuels reader incredulity toward the idea of creating class mobility for oneself, especially in a colonial society that inherently prevents the self-determination of its native subjects. Aptly, the narrator asks: “Who would have thought that something so nuanced could come out of a head with such a bad haircut and whose other end was an indio with bad shoes, and who, just a little while before, had been classified among the lower orders of animal?” (46). Though he overcomes poverty and hunger, to eventually improve his public image via “shirts that were always clean and pressed” (45-6) and gain acceptance to medical school (47), Basilio’s educational fairytale ironically reiterates the colonial separation between the Spaniard and the Filipino.

With Rizal using illustration rather than dialogue to delineate the anti-colonial in *Touch Me Not*, locating Basilio as either personifying evidence of progress or antiquity in *El Filibusterismo* becomes increasingly difficult. The ideal nature of his character’s rise in Philippine colonial society is alluring, but Rizal’s emphasis on consequences and the

inherently punishable role of the indio, such optimistic development also appears to the reader as suspicious. Despite his former hardships, Basilio's successful navigation and participation within these societal frameworks makes him complicit in the continuance of the colonizer's aims. Since he has defied societal expectations in benefiting from a colonial education system, Basilio, like Ibarra, is reluctant to confirm that the same ideological apparatus of colonially controlled education contributes to his ethnic marginalization; he is representative of the passive and gradual acquaintance made between the Philippine native and the Spaniard, as the first learns to accept the latter's oversight.

Here, it is important to identify how the presence of the elder to advise impressionable youth not only recurs between Rizal's novels, but is also put to different didactic use in these texts. In *El Filibusterismo*, the wise but feeble Tasio is replaced with a cunning and aggressive middle-aged jewelry salesman named Simoun, who unlike the first is neither immobilized as an outcast nor politically ignored. The "jeweler" (later revealed to be a disguised, middle-aged Ibarra) is dangerously present and productive in Philippine society, interacting with both the rich and poor in what superficially appears to be marketing efforts to further his business. But selling fine jewelry to other vain Victorina-types serves as a façade for his plans to "pay tribute to victims of a corrupt society" by "destroying that system, to shatter the corruption...[for] it has doomed itself" (52). In the same way that Tasio advises Ibarra to bring his philanthropic plans to fruition, Simoun pointedly explains the importance of revolution to develop a national identity and free the Philippines from becoming "bad copies" of their own colonizer. In both situations, the youth are called to act, but I argue that when Simoun reveals his plans

to the student, the writer deliberately raises the stakes for Basilio, as readers have been made well aware of how much his character is capable of losing if he chooses to betray the very system that grants him class mobility.

For the purposes of analyzing the revolutionary roles that Rizal ascribes to the previously naïve youth in his novels, I plan to ignore the plot twist of Simoun's true identity as Ibarra from *Touch Me Not*. Too close a focus on Simoun's radical mentorship detracts from Basilio's recognition of the presence of colonial control, an important ideological awakening and subsequent dialogue that brings closure to Ibarra's truncated reaction and response to his position as an ideological subject to Spanish oversight. Furthermore, the following excerpt from a larger speech by Simoun to Basilio clarifies Rizal's decisive arrival at a political stance on colonial reform and is an interaction that I feel deserves further explication within this chapter, for it attends to questions of defining the Filipino identity at both a collective national and an individual level:

Simoun paused again. "I need you to use your influence with young people to fight against these foolhardy desires for Hispanization... That's just a road to becoming a bad copy. You don't want to assimilate into Spain? So develop your own character, create the foundation for a Philippine nation. They don't want to teach you their language? Then cultivate your own, spread it, and help the people hold onto their own way of thinking. Instead of subordinate thoughts, have independent thoughts, because it's not by his laws, rights, or customs that the Spaniard considers this his home, nor should the people consider this the Spaniard's nation, but he should always be considered the invader and the foreigner. Then sooner or later you'll have your freedom."  
Basilio took a breath. It was as if a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. (54-5)

Certainly, if Rizal was ever reluctant to utilize *Touch Me Not* to provide his readers with a more straightforward blueprint for societal progress in the Philippines, he abandoned such modesty in his sequel via Simoun's diatribe. Transparently outlined is a clear sense of support for the essential development of the Filipino identity as a crucial step toward



independence, and the notion that Spain—having repressed the individual “character” and “language” of the Philippines’ diverse indigenous populace for more than three centuries—can only recognize its moral and ideological intrusion through the rebellion of its subjects. Furthermore, the concept of reclaiming a sense of “home” for the Filipino by making the Spaniard unwelcome connects to Bhabha’s observation that “domestic spaces are sites of history’s most intricate invasions” (13). In this sense, the colonized populace has been detached from their psychological and physical homes respectively via an identity and “nation,” and that only through the choices of younger generations can they truly “have [their] freedom.” Accomplishing nationhood is not nearly as simple as Simoun describes, but as a point of arrival from the anti-colonial illustrations of *Touch Me Not*, Rizal effectively uses the jeweler to speak to a potentially passive indigenous youth, and by extension, to a Philippine readership less than five years away from taking up its 1896 revolution.

However, an example of verbal defiance as a response to increased resentment is seen in the chapter, “The Physics Class,” where both Rizal’s narrator and an indigenous student, Plácido Penitente, express a shared loss of patience with colonial authority. Despite Plácido’s demonstrated knowledge of “amalgams” via rote memorization of the textbook (108), his professor Father Millón accuses him of missing fifteen class days and threatens to incur an additional absence for both lateness and class disruption (109). Plácido, introduced to readers of *El Filibusterismo* as “one of the brightest Latinists and debaters” at Santo Tomás (93), reacts to the Dominican friar’s statement, pointing out: “It is impossible, Father, that one can be absent from class and still recite the lesson in class...as Your Reverence has said, to exist and to not exist” (110). Rizal leaves nothing

to surmise about Plácido's outrage, perhaps with exception to the student's mention of "existing" in two places at once, which given my reading of Bhabha firstly evokes the notion of "doubling" oneself to create separation from the disobedient Other. Likewise, I notice how issues of the subaltern connect with the student's mention of "existing." Plácido is part of what Spivak calls the "margins, or...silent center" of a populace "marked by epistemic violence" (78). However, departing from the truly voiceless location of the subaltern, I argue that the student's deviant reaction demonstrates his "ability to speak" (78) and knowledge of his subjugated position.

In such an environment where Plácido is well aware of his continued location as the Other, the student's exhibited rage also represents a decolonizing reaction to Fanon's point that "the settler has brought the native into existence and perpetuates his existence" (30). In fact, Plácido's conversation-ending declaration, that he has "had enough" and has the "right" not to be insulted, indicates a split from what Fanon calls the native's indebtedness to the colonial system. The student, unlike his predecessors, no longer recognizes the Spaniard's inclusion or approval as valuable. Certainly, Plácido's declarations are unseen in *Touch Me Not*, since even Elías, the novel's most cynical and subversive character, does not publically express his anger.

When the friar maintains his position, adding the insult: "With your philosopher's brain you can't conceive of a situation in which you can miss class and not know the lesson at the same time" (110), Plácido responds again, and this time, far differently than Rizal's other indigenous subjects. The student angrily "throws his book down," and before "storming out," replies, "That's it, Father! Your Reverence can check me off as much as you want, but you have no right to insult me. I've had enough!" (110). Plácido's

declaration connects to Bhabha's chapter of *The Location of Culture* titled "Signs Taken For Wonders" in which "wondrous" value is applied to the "book," or the Holy Bible (102). Alongside Bhabha's observations, readers of Rizal's text are reminded that the students' learning material is still determined by the colonizer. Father Millón's imposition of a "book" and Plácido's act of "throwing" it aside makes the clear statement that the material tokens that signify educational "transformation" are far from "universally adequate" for the colonized subject (105). Additionally demonstrated in this moment of the text is how the response of the "indio" in *El Filibusterismo* undergoes a drastic transformation away from the quiet submissiveness oft displayed in *Touch Me Not*. In comparison to the equally rational but pacifistic Tasio, Plácido confidently questions the friar's decision to incur an additional absence to his record, and in front of more than two hundred of his peers, verbalizes and gestures his refusal to submit to the Spanish friar's control. At last, the indio has demonstrated the shift from a place of immobilization to one of empowerment.

Rizal also uses Plácido's argument to reiterate the impractical nature of the Spanish-directed learning environment, given that the friar prioritizes his right to punish indigenous deviance instead of his students' demonstrated knowledge of the course material. However irrationally, the Spaniard remains fixated on flaunting his right to discipline and control; in Plácido's case, Father Millón indicates his intent to retain superiority over the student via his grade book. But unlike the familiar pattern of assertion and retribution seen in *Touch Me Not*, the student surprisingly does not grant the colonizer satisfaction through the continued infliction of what Mignolo calls the "colonial wound." When Plácido demands that Father Millón acknowledge his existence

in the classroom, and more importantly, as a capable and competent pupil, the first does not wait for an answer.

Plácido, like the indios of *Touch Me Not*, expects punishment for his behavior, but in definite contrast to the characters of Rizal's prior novel, he refuses to let the friar have the final word, and leaves the classroom to ensure that. Through this confrontation he receives an—albeit negative—acknowledgement from the Spaniard, and publically evades becoming yet another indigenous subaltern. Plácido's surprising exit from the classroom aligns with Fanon's argument in *Wretched of the Earth* that “Decolonisation never takes place un-noticed, for it influences individuals...fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors [...] The ‘thing’ which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself” (30). Readers are led to overlook the Plácido's humiliating position to instead view the student as a champion for the oppressed indio, whether in the classroom or colonial society. In speaking out he finds empowerment and separates himself from hundreds of his submissive peers. Thus after the student “threw his book down” and “stormed out” of the lecture hall, the narrator interjects:

The class was terrified. They had never seen an act of such personal dignity. The professor was astonished. Then he launched into the same sermon as always. He waxed greatly on innate pride, inborn ingratitude...the arrogance that dark spirits infused in the young, and so on. [...] He went on like that until the bell rang and class ended, two hundred thirty-four students, after a prayer, left the classroom as ignorant as when they had entered... Each and every one of them had wasted an hour of his life, and with it went a part of his dignity, his self-respect. [...] Their wounded dignity and youthful enthusiasm will turn into hatred and indolence. (110-1)

Plácido's defiance calls attention to the consequences of mistreating an entire generation via the classroom, whether through belittling or the imparting of “ignorance” via the poor

instruction of course material, cruel lessons which instead promote “hatred and indolence” among the colony’s youth. Now that Rizal’s native fearlessly expresses “personal dignity,” and thereby from the Spaniard’s perspective, “inborn ingratitude,” the writer indicates Plácido’s transition away from a need for the colonizer’s approval. Again, we are reminded through the narrator that the student’s expression of totality through dignity signals the presence of Fanon’s decolonization. But in underscoring the implications of breeding educated revolutionaries, perhaps the most ominous element of the narrator’s commentary, is the usage of the word “will,” to denote the students’ inevitable adoption of “hatred and indolence” as a reaction to their loss of “dignity” (111). Through such decisiveness in language choice, Rizal warns that the violence of decolonization is already occurring in Santo Tomás and other universities like it; Plácido’s loss of patience with colonial authority is only one instance of a behavior that is spreading among other educated youth. His outspokenness will gradually become familiar as others at Santo Tomás simply become tired of their professors’ attempts to guilt or shame them into ideological submission.

Another similarly extensive but private exchange between a discontented indigenous subject and his former Spanish instructor occurs in the twenty-seventh chapter of *El Filibusterismo* titled “The Friar and the Filipino.” By this point in the text, Rizal has given intermittent attention to Plácido’s gradual congregation with other discontented peers at Santo Tomás, together forming a group of fourteen young men to support the development of an academy specifically for the “study of Castilian” (88). Their petition to make the colonizer’s language accessible for wider learning and use is met with mixed reactions from the university’s friars, with only one professor, Father Fernández,

expressing support for the proposed department's potential to "celebrate" the importance of learning Spanish. To his colleagues, the friar intuitively remarks: "To what end are we trying to tyrannize the population? In the end, they are many and we are few. [...] It happens that now the people are weak... Tomorrow they will be stronger, they will understand where their interests lie and we won't be able to stop them" (91). A Spanish character with uncommon foresight, Father Fernández reappears in "The Friar and the Filipino" to finally dialogue with Isagani, his former student.

Although I am eager to provide my close reading on Isagani, the alumnus' dialogue with Father Fernández spans the entire chapter's ten pages, and is packed with more material worthy of additional postcolonial critique than this portion of my thesis can provide. What is especially unique about this chapter-long exchange is that the colonizer—despite his biases—makes a genuine attempt to understand the colonized subject's plight. Father Fernández recognizes the students' gradual movement away from what Fanon calls "unpreparedness" and a lack of unity to a state of collaboration, and he—in contrast to the silencing methods of his colleagues—is eager to hear specifically from Isagani. As one of several key ideological discussions that exemplify the political clarity of *El Filibusterismo*, theirs is a conversation in which the indigenous student intellectually bests his Western instructor. In light of this, I instead point out two moments where Isagani overturns colonial power structures to assert his voice: when he emphatically tells Father Fernández what the indigenous students want, and upon renewing discussion of the doubled caricature via a comparison of the indio to a "poorly done" sculpture.

Knowledgeable of the students' rising frustrations, Father Fernández requests to privately meet with his former student, Isagani, to inquire about the alumnus's involvement in anti-government rallies. The friar begins his interrogation by disappointedly equating the former student's adopted political beliefs with his failure as a teacher. But these remarks do not elicit guilt or indebtedness from Isagani, who calmly admits to his activism and states: "Here any independent thought, any word that does not echo the will of the powerful is called *filibusterismo*" (235). The student recognizes that all who behave in this manner are "courting persecution," to which the narrator remarks: "The young man was even more independent thinking than [the friar] had surmised"(236). Like Plácido's loss of patience, so too has Isagani "awakened" to the abuses of the Spaniard and chooses the colonially controlled environment of the university to give voice to his frustrations.

Yet in the intimate space of the professor's office—a different form of the colonizer's domain—Rizal creates new tensions of interaction between the Spaniard and the equally articulate indio. There, without the pressure of an audience to maintain the appearances of colonial power structures, both parties are able to aggressively exchange and debate their perspectives. Yet it is not solely through his entrance into the office, but rather his exhibited command of the Spanish language and Western influenced intellect, that Isagani's presence further upsets the assumed disparity between the colonizer and colonized subject. Thus when Father Fernández asks, "What do the Filipino students want from us?" the immediate reply he receives, "That you fulfill your responsibilities!" confuses the Spaniard, with his surprise demonstrating his unfamiliarity with scrutiny (236). Verbally, the former student indicates to the friar that the first's identity is gaining

dangerous totality; Isagani has already learned what Fanon calls “the revolutionary assurance” that “[the native’s] life...and skin are not of different value as those of the settler” (36-7). Having rerouted the conversation, the alumnus clarifies his stance, saying:

As a Filipino student I can only talk about your responsibilities to us. The friars...and the Dominicans in the particular, who have the sole discretion over all Filipino youth education, have made a contract with the eight million inhabitants here, with Spain and humanity, to create an honorable people, prosperous, intelligent... Have you fulfilled your contract? (237)

Albeit privately, the student rhetorically infiltrates the colonizer’s domain, and the friar finds himself barely able to defend the colonial stance. It becomes apparent that Father Fernández’s authority, or more generally the qualifications of his Dominican colleagues, has never before experienced such direct questioning. The fact that the interrogator is a product of the colonial education system further primes the office setting for violence in terms of a verbal confrontation. Such is an unusual but decisive turning point for the Rizal’s progression of the indio, from a place of voiceless resentment to one unafraid of using the colonizer’s language to interrogate colonial authority, since “as far as the native is concerned, morality is concrete; it is to silence the settler’s defiance, to break his flaunting violence” (Fanon 36). Isagani ingeniously positions the shocked friar to salvage the order’s image before advancing his argument against the hegemonic suppression of the Filipino people; the first is “assured” of the colonizer’s failures to truly “fulfill its responsibilities.”

Thus when the professor can only reply, “We are fulfilling it” (237), the youth launches into his verbal offensive. It is here that for once, readers are provided with a decisive statement on behalf of not only the discontent of the youth in *El Filibusterismo*, but also the politically subalterned progress-seekers in *Touch Me Not*. Through Isagani’s



remarks to Father Fernández, Rizal at last summarizes the demands of the indigenous intellectual, when the former student states:

The friars have made themselves into our intellectual suppliers... Freedom is to a man what education is to the intelligence, and the fact that the friars don't want us to have it is the basis of our discontent. [...] I agree with you that we have our defects. But whose fault is that? Yours, after three and a half centuries of our education in your hands, or ours, when we bow down in the face of everything? If after three and a half centuries the sculptor has only been able to create a caricature, it will almost definitely come out poorly done." (238-9)

Suddenly and harshly, Isagani declares the friars neither necessary nor adequate to the people's wellbeing, furthermore, and deems the orders' "three and a half centuries" of involvement detrimental to the islands' indigenous. In addressing the cultivation of Filipino subservience through the concept of the "caricature," he evokes the same issues of incompleteness and voiceless reflected by the female characters of the previous chapter, who remain unsuccessful in their attempts to secure inclusion or equality via the colonizer's physical domain. Finally, the alumnus's argument that the friars are an impediment to the "sculpting" of the indio further suggests his generation's nationalistic transition towards finally being able to find pride in their native heritage. For too long, Isagani contends, the "defects" resulting from "poor" instruction and treatment have been blamed on the supposedly nurtured student, and not his or her intellectual "supplier." Thus, if "reproducing" the Philippines' "current condition" in *Touch Me Not* leaves unanswered questions about his proposed actions and reactions to Spanish oversight, the frank outlining of his frustrations with the friars' intrusive and demeaning presence in the Philippines removes any remaining doubt.

CONCLUSION: WHEN THE “PAST IS PROLOGUE”: WHERE I MEET AND  
DEPART FROM RIZAL

When I was a college freshman at the University of Portland, I nervously scheduled an appointment to meet with my very first English professor during his office hour, convinced that what I had written for his assignment was inadequate. I was focused on packaging my essay as perfectly as possible, and explained my disappointment about not yet knowing how to arrive at an appropriate conclusion. After reviewing my draft, he bluntly told me that I “would be fine in grad school.” My professor was on the verge of retirement after forty years of service at the Catholic college; the world of academia had been his, and his comment about my potential to contribute to that intellectual space terrified me. I mentioned that I still could not imagine writing more than 900 words per essay, and clumsily asked: “Well, how do you find something worth writing about, worth researching for years? And to have so much to say about it?” My professor said, “The goal is to overturn a new stone, to find that one thing no one has talked or written about before. You’ll find yours.”

This thesis marks the long process following my discovery of “a stone to overturn,” which begins with José Rizal’s novels and my decision to better understand them through much postcolonial research of my own. I found *Touch Me Not* and *El Filibusterismo* solely as a result of my simple curiosity to learn more about Rizal the “national hero,” and my realization of his texts’ lack of presence in postcolonial and nationalist discourse provided much of the initial intrigue and excitement needed to fuel

my writing. But I have never viewed undertaking such extensive research on these novels as a matter of my own academic attainment, because much of the theoretical learning that I have undergone to familiarize myself with his texts has also led to unexpected frustrations. If I am asked to identify one thing that I have learned in the past two years, it is that the study of postcolonial theory, nationalist discourse, and literatures involving both perspectives does not provide immediate gratification. To work closely with theory is to begrudgingly acknowledge the continued instability of every reading that I complete of Rizal's work. Even at this point in my writing, I remain within the ongoing cycle of attempting to understand and communicate how othered identities stagnate or transform into examples of nationalistic pride from *Touch Me Not* to *El Filibusterismo*. This is a position that I am still not fully comfortable with, because it means that I must loosen my grip on attaining the same type of perfectly packaged conclusion that I wanted so terribly as a college freshman.

Over the past year, I have inundated myself with postcolonial theory, nationalist discourse, and examined Rizal's own editorials and other historical texts, only to rethink my findings—and repeatedly question the theoretical terms themselves—when I look for the anti-colonial or nationalistic in both novels. The more I wrote about “voice” and “presence” the more I frustratingly discovered its varied portrayals and occurrences within the texts; for Rizal, the indio not only attempts to verbalize his or her discontent, but also acts and reacts to colonial suppression. Soon, Tasio's physical sequestration but continued “outspokenness” via his writing became almost equivalent to Consolación's muteness paired with her penchant for violence. I could not overlook the ways in which Rizal's progress-seekers and Spanish wannabes evidently shared more qualities than

differed. These characters maintain a defiant presence through productivity, and it is via their behaviors within the fractured and subjugated colonized status that I grounded my understanding of what it means to lack and assert political voice.

The same is to be said for the issues of identity completeness or totality among the indios I examined for this thesis; where Ibarra's work toward progress abruptly ends in *Touch Me Not*, students like Plácido and Isagani attain their colonizer's attention in Rizal's second novel. Regardless of the tangibility of their goals, they deeply embed their sense of self into their efforts to gain the Spaniard's respect. Thus the evidence of rejection is devastating and enraging to the indio who is made aware of his or her failures, and maligning to the subject in denial of his or her subjugation. In the same way that the students are led to publically demand that the friars' acknowledge their petition for the increased study of the Spanish language, Victorina so desperately wants to be treated with the same reverence as the colonizer. But unlike the latter's poor efforts to physically improve herself via a Spanish identity, Plácido and Isagani's bold questioning and logic in *El Filibusterismo* at last overrides Tasio's hopelessness in the previous novel that

[The government and its people] will live like those idiotic young men who tremble at their tutor's voice, though they seek his approval... The people don't complain because they have no voice, but one day...a frightening response will arrive. (166)

Evidently, both students' courageous responses reflects a culmination and completion in the maturity of a decolonial identity, indicating the Filipino's psychological movement from submissiveness to proactivity, a political epiphany unforeseeable in solely reading *Touch Me Not*. Through the transformation of the indio from a state of learned submission to one of nationalistic thinking, readers are implored to recognize the

potential of the formerly “idiotic” youth to successfully—and however violently—enact societal change. These illustrations of student defiance in *El Filibusterismo* support Benedict Anderson’s discussion of the emergence of “nationalist intelligentsias in the colonies” as an event rooted in the “young, which signified dynamism, self-sacrificing idealism and revolutionary will” (119). It is via the recognition of the “first generation in any significant numbers to have acquired a European education” (119) that Rizal’s indigenous subjects—beginning with Tasio frustrations and as seen in Ibarra’s incomplete school project—are at last given a sense of totality through the students’ newfound sense of purpose.

Having been able to interrogate Rizal’s discourse through such complex characters and their own unique political agendas, the process of literary and theoretical interpretation—though mostly in English—gives me a newfound appreciation for the work of Rizal’s translators to keep these texts as accessible and riveting as the originals. In an effort to learn a bit about the challenges of literary translation, I have used a portion of this research process to improve my reading knowledge of the Spanish language to examine Rizal’s writings prior to translation, investing additional hours of independent study and peer consultation into my schedule. I have chosen to do this for several reasons, although an especially crucial one stems from my agreement with Walter Mignolo’s argument that

Knowledge-making entrenched in imperial/colonial purposes...was grounded in specific languages, institutions, and geo-historical locations. The languages of Western imperial knowledge-making were practiced by social actors dwelling in a specific geo-historical space...in the process of creating their own Christian, Western, and European identity. (141)

Given my interests in understanding Rizal's anti-colonial portrayals of the Filipino ethnic and national identity, a long-term study of his novels demands that I eventually forego reliance on the texts in English. Alongside the original Spanish versions, I will be able to further determine or unsettle the findings that I have made in the last three chapters, for as Mignolo states, it is through these "specific languages" that the Filipino works toward a "Western" identity, encounters setbacks, and gradually gains a sense of political voice. Although Rizal's characters easily represent "social actors" whose identities are in flux, he himself embodies this position as he crafts Philippine society and its inhabitants under Spanish rule for his readership, given that he is uniquely "grounded" and immersed in these colonial institutions via his university studies in Spain.

However, I view the process of improving my knowledge of the language as twofold: doing so allows me to not only better understand and raise questions about the anti-colonial discussions that Rizal gives emphasis to, but more importantly, the "geohistorical" space that surprisingly benefited my own ancestors. Through my maternal great-great grandfather Paulino Tolentino, a Spanish tax collector, my family is still legally connected to the Philippines via hundreds of hectares of farmland that he received from the colonial government as "pay." The amount of land that Spain gave him was so excessive that, even when divided among and handed down to his grandchildren, each beneficiary received enough to comfortably "live on," whether in actually cultivating one's own crops, or renting and selling portions to other townspeople. Consequently, learning the Spanish language to read Rizal's novels in their original form has much to do with my curiosity about my cultural identity through Paulino, and the intrigue surrounding his education and upbringing in light of his profession. I cannot deny that my

realization of his participation in the practices of colonial oversight affects how I read Rizal's demonization of the Spaniard, knowing that my family is historically associated with the colonizer.

Furthermore, I now recognize my family's acquisition of land as it is directly connected to *encomienda*, a system enacted throughout Latin America and the Philippines that allowed "Spanish colonists the right to collect tribute from the locals of a certain area, in supposed exchange for military protection and education in the faith" (Thomas 183). His granddaughter—my grandmother, Natividad Tolentino—remains in the process of relinquishing her percentage of this hefty inheritance, an effort complicated by her final surviving brother's illiteracy and the loss of her deceased brothers' land deeds. She hopes to complete the legalities necessary to remove her name—and thus her descendants—from the farmland during her lifetime. If she is unsuccessful, the land will be passed down continuously, and perhaps even more troublingly, the property will never be returned to those in the Philippines who can truly take care of it. While relinquishing grandmother's portion of the land will sever my family's final material tie to the former island colony—one that undoubtedly elevated my ancestors' wealth and status in the northern province of Ilocos Sur—it is the most pragmatic and decolonizing decision that we can make.

The remaining evidence of my family's acquisition of material wealth dissolves temporal boundaries between both the experiences of Rizal's contemporaries and later generations of Filipinos who know nothing about Spanish rule but remain affected by legal matters tied to the colonial period. With the postcolonial "experience" still at work more than six generations after Spain's exit from the Philippines, *Touch Me Not* and *El*

*Filibusterismo* grant today's readers of the texts—whether Filipino or not—valuable insights into the Spanish colonial system and its oppressiveness. In their efforts to do so, I argue that these novels also allow those who are knowledgeable of the former colony's past to question and contemplate the troubling pervasiveness of Spain's ideological and governmental presence in the Philippines. Arriving at this thought instead returns me to my aforementioned statement about Rizal's illustrations of the indio's choice to privilege the colonially defined systems of identity. I cannot help but wonder if I would be nearly as interested in Paulino or the remote concept of my Spanish background if Fanon's notion of "whiteness" had never been anchored as valuable within the Filipino consciousness.

Thus I still relate to Basilio's feelings of speechlessness when Simoun confronts him, since both *Touch Me Not* and *El Filibusterismo* continue to challenge me with issues of identity and belonging that I still find incredibly difficult to not only pinpoint but articulate. Much like Victorina's obsession with "being Spanish," the decision to "be Filipino" comes with expectations to maintain what Chimamanda Adichie calls the "single story," which she defines as "to show a people as one thing...over and over again, until that is what they become." If we superficially read Rizal's novels to prove the indios' victimization, we will see nothing but the writer's affirmation of the community's poor treatment, rather than the clear efforts that his indigenous subjects make to finally attain political voice.

When viewed in this way, the people's perseverance within both texts is easily overlooked, and the Filipino is acknowledged only in terms of his or her subservient and mistreated roles in colonial society. Likewise, the superficial establishment of the abusive



Spaniard in these novels diminishes the presence of characters like Father Fernández, who despite his political biases is willing to dialogue to his indigenous student. Here, Adichie's additional elaboration on the concept of "stereotype" as not necessarily "untrue, but incomplete," applies to the complexities surrounding the Filipino's unfortunate acceptance of his or her reliance on the colonizer's approval. In the same way that I contemplate my own ethnic identity through imagining Paulino's role and reputation in Philippine colonial society, Rizal's Filipino desires similar affirmation, but more specifically, that his or her presence will receive someone's recognition.

But only in disregarding my personal experiences can I fully relate to Rizal's struggle to motivate the Filipino to find satisfaction in the indigenous heritage. The writer could not have foreseen that his self-absorbed Victorina and Consolación prototypes would manifest again, via the heavily publicized frivolous lifestyles of the Philippines' former president Ferdinand Marcos and shoe-collecting wife, Imelda. Neither could Rizal have known that the corruption and violence he wanted to eliminate from the islands' through Spain's departure would abound again in Marcos' presidency, less than a century after his death. Because of these public figures, and those within the culture who propagate the prioritization of greed and showiness, my family has never been able to claim the same pride in simply "being Filipino" that he encourages.

To this extent, Vicente L. Rafael makes an excellent point that "[*Touch Me Not*] is an untimely book, as Rizal understands it. It cannot be judged by the present, only the future" (101). In a country with hundreds of dialects unintelligible to one another, the label of Filipino is often too broad to describe its diverse populace. This leads regions and languages to become not only more accurate descriptors of identity, but also potentially

further divisive ones to national unity through the perpetuation of Adichie's "single story" and "stereotype." For my grandparents who immigrated to Hawaii shortly the Second World War, to minimally share regional ties with the corrupt Philippine president was to be "associated" with him. Consequently with the Marcos' once representing the island nation and its people, the question of "being Filipino" becomes an undesirable one, for it demands that we regard other Victorinas and blatant political corruption as the norm, or worse, the standard. Such unfortunate familiarity with exploitation that tainted my grandparents' views of their home country is a sentiment that I strongly believe instilled my mother's pessimism toward her heritage.

It should be unsurprising that such shame and embarrassment toward these broadcasted portrayals of Filipino extravagance have the potential to lead individuals or communities toward cultural disassociation and resentment, and by extension, a larger loss of national unity. But while to seek entrance into the "dominant society" can be seen as dishonest to one's ethnic background, to wholly refuse assimilation is counterproductive. Idealistically, retaining knowledge of history and heritage should be of utmost importance to the postcolonial subject instead of basely rejecting the position of the indio, because awareness of the first battles the onset of historical amnesia and focus of victimization in the second. Rizal's novels grant readers this balance. For the writer and his experiences with Spanish rule in the Philippines, the events of cultural loss and the subsequent decolonizing search for identity are intertwined.

The fact that Filipino society permitted Marcos' oppressive rise and control reiterates Rizal's 19<sup>th</sup> century observations of its "defects and shortcomings." Not unlike Spain's colonial mismanagement and centuries of abuses in the islands, Marcos' decades-

long political career is indicative of the people's familiarity with manipulation and the absence of actual freedom, sentiments that are evident throughout both *Touch Me Not* and *El Filibusterismo*. I contemplate this issue of familiarity toward the corrupt in several ways: the Filipino people did not learn from their experiences under Spanish rule, they simply forgot the poor treatment they had endured, or as stated above, continued interactions and conflicts with government leadership led to a distorted belief in the necessity of political dishonesty. There is still much to be said about historical amnesia, with evidence of it reflected by the quick loss of the Spanish language immediately after America's takeover of the former colony. But as Benedict Anderson phrases it, I recognize that I cannot "speak on behalf" of the writer, his fellow *ilustrados*, and certainly other Filipinos. It is through the surprise of encountering the culturally familiar in a late-nineteenth century text that leads me to wonder if Rizal has instead shown me the origins of my ingrained frustrations.

I acknowledge that over time, my research interests will grow to include new writers, new areas of Spanish colonialism that I have yet to "overturn." Thus to examine Rizal's books within postcolonial discourse is the least I can do to bring attention to his literary contributions, with the aim of someday continuing the exciting unearthing of other indigenous writers and their texts. I find much comfort in Bishop Kenneth Untener's statement: "We cannot do everything and there is a sense of freedom in understanding that. This allows us to do something, and to do it very well" (1). In spite of Spain's physical departure from the former island colony, the psychological effects of colonial dehumanization remain; the Filipino is still faced with societal pressures to prove his or her worth. My exposure to remnants of Spanish colonialism in the Philippines—

despite being a product of the West—is an experience that inherently affects my reading of *Touch Me Not* and *El Filibusterismo* and needs to be acknowledged in light of the postcolonial.

Thus the process of reading his novels guided by theory has helped to illuminate sources of identity crisis and feelings of inadequacy that remain all too present and familiar in both his characters, and in my life. Again, this is certainly another stone still in the stages of being overturned. For now, I can only hope that the Philippines will eventually abandon its reliance on corruption and entitlement, and allow its disillusioned citizens and diaspora to renew their faith in the country and strengthen pride in their heritage. I must admit, though, that I will not wait in eager anticipation for that day.

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